COMBAT AIRCRAFT 126

Edward M Young

B-25 MITCHELL UNITS OF THE CBI

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SERIES EDITOR TONY HOLMES

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INTRODUCTION

In his classic work *On War*, Carl von Clausewitz noted the importance of lines of communication connecting an army to its operational base. Over these arteries, as von Clausewitz called them, flowed the materials and supplies necessary to sustain an army at war. Disrupting or cutting these arteries could, he argued, cause an army 'to wither and die'. As armies modernised and acquired rapid-firing rifles, machine guns, artillery, motor vehicles, and the full range of other equipment necessary for modern warfare, the issue of supply and sustaining logistical support to armies in the field became more complex, and their dependence on lines of communication more critical. In von Clausewitz's era, an army could cut its opponent's lines of communication through envelopment or a turning movement. A hundred years later a new weapon of war, the aeroplane, created an entirely new method of attacking an enemy's lines of communication and his sources of supply.

Aerial interdiction, as it came to be called, had its origins in the early months of World War 1, when French and British aircraft bombed railway lines that the German armies were using to aid in their advance. From then until the end of the conflict in November 1918, French, British and, later, American bombers carried out regular attacks on railway lines and supply depots in enemy-held territory.

In the post-World War 1 era, air power theorists saw an enemy's supply system as a primary objective of bombardment aviation. Enemy lines of

During the final months of the war the 1st BG received new B-25Js, including some solid nose strafer versions. Three J-models from the 1st BS fly in formation in May 1945. These machines carry their USAAF serial numbers and their 1st BS aircraft numbers, but no squadron insignia. Application of serial numbers on CACW B-25s varied considerably (*Courtesy Carl Molesworth*)

communication carrying supplies to the front were considered to be the most promising targets for bombardment. Railways were the backbone of land transportation and often had numerous points of vulnerability such as bridges and tunnels. Rail facilities, like marshalling yards, had the additional benefit of being large, fixed targets that were relatively easy to identify and attack.

After World War 1, American air power theorists conceived of bombardment aviation as having two missions – tactical missions intended to have an immediate impact on the battlefield, and strategic missions against targets at a greater distance from the battlefield that would have a delayed impact on operations of ground forces. Over time the definition of these operations changed so that tactical missions came to incorporate aerial interdiction in support of ground forces, while strategic missions in American air power doctrine shifted to an emphasis on the defeat of an enemy nation through attacks on its economic system and its ability to make war.

As a result of combat experience in the early years of World War 2, and the intense debate over the control of air power, these distinctions in tactical and strategic missions came to be incorporated in a new statement of American air power doctrine entitled FM 100-20 *Command and Employment of Air Power*, published in July 1943. FM 100-20 defined the mission of the tactical air force in a theatre of war as the attainment of, first, air superiority, second, preventing the

movement of enemy troops and supplies to or within the theatre, and third, to carry out attacks in the immediate battle area in support of the ground forces. To prevent the movement of supplies, the tactical air force would conduct attacks on enemy lines of communications, supply depots, troop concentrations and other military installations with the objective of isolating the battlefield to weaken the opposing enemy ground forces.

Tactical aerial interdiction came to be seen as the primary mission of what by the late 1930s and early 1940s were called medium bombers to distinguish them from the heavy bombers that would make up the strategic bombing force. In August 1939 the US Army Air Corps (USAAC) announced orders for 184 North American Aviation B-25 Mitchell and 201 Martin B-26 Marauder twin-engined medium bombers to replace its older twin-engined Douglas B-18 Bolos. The USAAC (soon to become the US Army Air Force) assigned these new aircraft to specially designated medium bomber units known as Bombardment Group (Medium). By the end of the war North American Aviation had delivered 9816 B-25 bombers to US and Allied air forces, with Martin providing 5266 B-26s. American medium bombers served in every theatre of war, but of the two types the Mitchell saw the most widespread service.

In the China-Burma-India (CBI) Theatre the B-25 Mitchell provided the backbone for the aerial interdiction campaigns conducted over Burma and China by the USAAF's Tenth and Fourteenth Air Forces from June 1942 until August 1945. At their peak in October 1944, there were no fewer than 304 B-25s serving with two USAAF medium bombardment groups (one assigned to the Tenth Air Force and the other to the Fourteenth Air Force). An additional 60 or so Mitchells were assigned to the 1st Bombardment Group (Medium) Provisional

of the Chinese-American Composite Wing (CACW), which was also serving with the Fourteenth Air Force in China. Finally, 70 to 80 B-25s equipped reconnaissance and training units and served as high-speed transports for senior officers in India and China.

The aerial interdiction campaigns in Burma and China were long, difficult and relentless. While the B-25 units in the Tenth and Fourteenth Air Forces may not have faced the same level of danger from flak and fighters as their counterparts in Europe or the Pacific, they had to cope with often appalling weather, geographical constraints, shortages of aircrew, aeroplanes, spare parts and especially gasoline, and the resourcefulness of Imperial Japanese Army (IJA) engineers who could seemingly repair railway bridges and marshalling yards as fast as Mitchell crews could bomb them.

Aircrew flying missions into Burma knew that if they were shot down, they had little chance of escape, and a far greater likelihood of ending up in a brutal Japanese prison camp. As the CBI had a far lower priority than the European or Pacific theatres until well into the war, there were rarely enough aeroplanes to carry out the sustained and concentrated attacks required for a successful aerial interdiction campaign, which was above all a battle of attrition. A further hindrance was the fact that the IJA, unlike its American, British or German counterparts, relied on a much lower level of supplies for its daily existence. Aerial interdiction is more successful when the enemy force has a high rate of consumption.

A B-25H from the 82nd BS/12th BG after dropping bombs on an IJA supply area in Kinu, Burma, on 12 November 1944. The objective of interdiction was to disrupt the flow of materiel to the enemy through attacks on its lines of communication and supply depots (*3A-37580, Record Group 342H, National Archives and Records Administration (NARA)*)

Successful aerial interdiction campaigns also require sustained pressure on the right targets – a function of good intelligence on an enemy's logistical system and careful target selection. In a country as vast as China, this was not always possible. Nevertheless, the B-25 medium bomber groups in the CBI kept up their efforts despite these constraints, and over time crews developed the tactics and techniques that made the Mitchell an effective aerial interdiction weapon.

In Burma the monsoon season lasts from the beginning of May to the end of September, covering much of the country in cloud and heavy rain. The weather in central Burma is somewhat better, and this allowed the B-25s to continue missions but at a reduced rate. These two 490th BS bombers were photographed flying through broken clouds. The closer aircraft has the revised national insignia, incorporating a bar with a red surround, authorised in June 1943 (*3A-33618, RG342H, NARA*)

CHAPTER ONE

BUILDING AN AIR OFFENSIVE IN THE CBI

In 1942 the War Department created the China-Burma-India Theatre, under the command of Lt Gen Joseph Stilwell, to oversee all American operations in support of China. The theatre's area of command stretched from Karachi (then part of India) to eastern China, a distance of more than 3300 miles by air, encompassing all of India, China and Southeast Asia. America's objective was to ensure that Chinese forces continued to resist Japan, thereby containing the nearly one million Japanese soldiers and airmen stationed in China and Manchuria. American military planners also saw China as a likely base from where USAAF heavy bombers could launch a strategic aerial campaign against Japan. Finally, China was being considered as a possible base from where to launch an invasion of Japan.

The loss of Burma in early 1942 cut China's last line of land communication to the west, leaving only the precarious air route from northeast India over the Himalayas to China that became known as the 'Hump'. In February 1942 the USAAF activated the Tenth Air Force to control all air operations in the CBI. It was led by Maj Gen Lewis Brereton, former commander of the Far East Air Force in the Philippines and Deputy Commander, Air Forces, American-British-Dutch-Australian Command. Brereton brought with him

from Australia the 'skeletons' of two USAAF units, namely the 7th BG and the 51st FG, to form the nucleus of the Tenth Air Force.

In outlining the requirements for his new force, Brereton expressed a preference for medium bombers over heavy bombers. He based this request on the recognition that weather over Burma and China would often make high altitude bombing difficult. Moreover, while there were few targets in either country that could be considered strategic, there were many that would be suitable interdiction targets for medium bombers, including extensive railway systems, supply centres and enemy-occupied airfields. With few fighters available for escorting bombers, Brereton believed the faster medium bombers would have less risk of interception from Japanese fighters. Although he wanted a full medium bomber group assigned to the Tenth Air Force, all the War Department could allocate him at the time were 35 B-25s. Brereton did, however, receive permission in April 1942 to convert the 7th BG into a composite group, with two heavy and two medium bombardment squadrons. The latter were the 11th and 22nd Bombardment Squadrons (Medium).

These units were activated on 26 April 1942 and their personnel attached to the 17th Bombardment Group (Medium) for training. On 1 May the air echelons of the two squadrons departed the USA for the flight across Africa and the Middle East to Karachi as part of Project 157. By the end of May 18 B-25Cs had arrived in Karachi, with three aeroplanes having been lost along the way. Brereton was promised an additional 57 B-25s, but it would take nearly a year for this number of Mitchells to reach the CBI. With such a small force of medium bombers and even fewer heavy bombers, there was not much Brereton could hope to achieve. He decided to send the 11th BS to China and to retain the 22nd BS in India to operate over Burma from bases in Assam as soon as these could be made ready. A few weeks later Brereton was recalled to the Middle East following Generalfeldmarschall Erwin Rommel's advance into Egypt with the Afrika Korps, taking with him all of the Tenth Air Force's serviceable heavy bombers.

It was imperative to move USAAF units to China to help sustain the fight against Japan and defend Kunming, the eastern terminus of the air transport route from India to China. Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek had agreed that the American Volunteer Group (AVG) under Claire Chennault could be incorporated into the USAAF, and on this basis the latter was recalled to active duty initially with the rank of colonel. Before his departure for the Middle East, Brereton decided to form a subsidiary command under Chennault designated the China Air Task Force (CATF), with the 23rd FG, to be activated on 4 July 1942 concurrently with activation of the CATF to absorb the remaining pilots and staff of the AVG and the 11th BS.

A Chinese soldier stands guard over two 11th BS B-25Cs at their airfield in China. The 11th BS gave the CATF the capability to strike at a range of Japanese targets, but the squadron rarely had more than a handful of B-25s available (*3A-01000, RG342H, NARA*)

The 11th's move to China ended in tragedy. Unit CO Maj Gordon Leland had led six aircraft and crews from Karachi to Dinjan, in Assam – the jumping off point for flights to Kunming. He then planned to fly on to Kunming via the Burmese town of Lashio, bombing the airfield there on the way. After Leland departed Dinjan at 0600 hrs on 3 June the weather worsened and the flight became separated. Five aircraft managed to reform and bomb the airfield, with the sixth Mitchell following shortly thereafter. Two Japanese fighters attacked the last B-25, with the top turret gunner claiming one damaged, but during repeated passes the radio operator suffered a fatal wound. This aircraft made its own way to Kunming.

A group of 11th BS gunners play cards while waiting to take off on a mission. Soon after arriving in China the squadron painted over the serial numbers on the tails of its aircraft – a practice the Fourteenth Air Force continued. The unit's armament officer also removed the remote-controlled belly turret and replaced it with a mounting for two 0.30-cal machine guns (*Record Group 208AA, Box 12: China-Air, Folder X-19, NARA*)

As the formation of five Mitchells entered Chinese airspace they ran into a solid overcast. Maj Leland's aircraft, his wingman and the leader of the second element following him slammed into a mountain, killing all on board. The remaining two bombers saw the explosions, which illuminated the grass and trees just beneath them, and managed to avoid the mountain. One aircraft reached their new base, but the second ran out of fuel and the crew had to bail out, reaching their new base two weeks later. They had become the first of many crews to find their way back to their Chinese airfields after bailing out. In one morning Chennault had lost nearly half his bomber force.

One week later three more B-25Cs arrived from India, followed by another three on 16 June. The crews then spent two weeks preparing their aircraft for operations. The C-model's belly turret, operated remotely through a periscope, was considered useless. The squadron's armament officer had the turret removed and designed a mounting for two 0.30-cal machine guns firing through the opening. These eight medium bombers gave Chennault his first offensive force, small as it was. Over the next seven months he would use the 11th BS to conduct a form of guerrilla war from the air, flying from forward bases in eastern and southern China to strike at Japanese installations ranging from Hong Kong to Hanoi, in what was then French Indochina, keeping his small force of bombers on the move.

The 11th BS flew its first combat mission in China on 1 July 1942, staging out of the airfield at Kweilin to bomb shipping in the Yangtze River at Hankow. Three aircraft subsequently returned the next day to target the docks and warehouses alongside. On 3 July, flying from Hengyang with an escort of AVG P-40s, five B-25s attacked a Japanese airfield, claiming six aircraft destroyed on the ground and one intercepting fighter shot down. Then it was back to Kweilin to refuel and rearm for a raid on Tien Ho airfield at Canton on 4 July, followed by an attack on the Canton docks and warehouses two days later. After a week's rest, four aircraft targeted Hankow again on 15 July. Returning to Hengyang, they had not finished refuelling when an air-raid alert sent the bombers retreating south to the dispersal airfield at Lingling. Unfortunately, nearing Lingling, one of the B-25s came under attack from

RIGHT
On 9 August 1942 Chennault sent five B-25s to bomb the docks at Haiphong in the CATF's first attack on targets in French Indochina. Here, a Mitchell turns away having dropped its bombs on the docks and the warehouses alongside, which are now covered in smoke (*3A-2803, RG342H, NARA*)

Tien Ho airfield, near Canton, was a major IJAAF base and a frequent target for 11th BS B-25s. A mission to Tien Ho required an escort of P-40s, as Japanese fighters invariably rose up to challenge the bombers (*3A-2629, RG342H, NARA*)

an AVG P-40, whose pilot had mistaken it for a Japanese bomber. Although the Mitchell was shot down, the crew bailed out successfully and made it back to Kweilin.

After three more missions, including one to Canton, the squadron ceased operations for two weeks of needed maintenance. This would be the pattern for the next few months, with a spell of intense activity being followed by a period with no missions while aeroplanes underwent maintenance, waited for parts and gasoline, or sat out the weather.

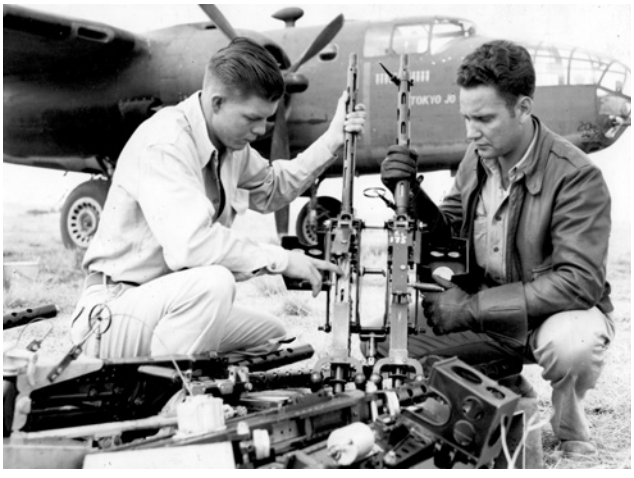
On 9 August, after two strikes on Tien Ho airfield at Canton, five B-25s with an escort of 23rd FG P-40s made history when they flew a mission to Haiphong, in French Indochina, staging through an advanced airfield at Nanning. This was the CATF's first attack on targets in French Indochina. Bombing from medium altitude, the B-25s hit the docks and warehouses in the port. After a two-week break for maintenance, missions resumed at the end of August when Chennault shifted the bombers to Yunnanyi, west of Kunming, for a strike against the airfield and railway line at Lashio. In their largest mission to date, eight B-25s flew to French Indochina to bomb an IJA barracks and supply dump, returning to Kunming to launch two missions on consecutive days against Japanese installations at Myitkyina, in Burma. The first flight of four aircraft bombed the airfield while the second flight hit the barracks. The aeroplanes flew on to Dinjan, where they refuelled and re-armed, returning to Kunming the next day via another attack on Myitkyina.

During September weather shut down operations for nearly three weeks – another recurring pattern the American airmen in China had to deal with. The weather in eastern China was usually bad from January to June, with heavy rain and cloud, then mostly clear for the rest of the year, while in western China the rains lasted from May to October.

At the start of the month 11th BS CO Maj William E Bayse flew a reconnaissance mission over Hanoi, in French Indochina, to gather information for future raids. Seven Kawasaki Ki-45 'Nick' twin-engined fighters intercepted his aircraft, making half-hearted attacks for 30 minutes and allowing Bayse's top-turret gunner to claim one as a probable. As a follow-up to Bayse's reconnaissance, four B-25s with an escort of ten P-40s returned to Hanoi on 25 September to bomb Gia Lam airfield. For the remainder

of the month and into early October, the 11th BS flew 11 missions supporting Chinese troops holding positions near the Salween River in northeast Burma, bombing Japanese concentrations at Lashio, Tengchung, Mengshih, Paoling and Lungling – towns the China-based medium bombers would return to again and again over the next two years.

Up to this point the 11th BS had not suffered any losses to Japanese fighters, but the squadron ran into stiff aerial opposition on a mission to Hong Kong at the end of October. After nearly a month's hiatus, 12 B-25s from the 11th BS and one aircraft from the 22nd BS up from India set off on a mission to bomb the docks in Hong Kong's Kowloon harbour on 25 October with an escort of seven P-40s. As the Mitchells turned away after completing their bomb run, they ran into a large group of single- and twin-engined Japanese fighters, who kept up persistent attacks on the diving bomber formation. The Japanese pilots pressed home their attacks, hitting one of the B-25s and setting its right engine on fire. As the bomber left the formation the Japanese fighters resumed their attack and the pilot had to crash-land the bomber in the rice paddies west of Hong Kong. Two of the crew managed to escape and make it back to Kweilin, the others being captured. The bombers returned with claims of seven fighters shot down and eight probables.



On several missions to bomb Tien Ho airfield in the autumn of 1942 the 11th BS ran into Japanese fighters. On 25 October SSgt Norton Stubblefield (left) received credit for two enemy fighters shot down, while his colleague Sgt Adam Williams (right), a veteran of the Doolittle raid on Tokyo, was credited with one fighter destroyed (*RG208AA, Box 12, FX-47, NARA*)

That night six aircraft returned to Hong Kong to bomb its power station, while another flight targeted warehouses in Canton in the 11th BS's first nocturnal mission.

After three weeks of flying sorties in support of Chinese troops, Chennault sent his small medium bomber force out to attack shipping along the southern China coast south to French Indochina. The first mission, on 22 November, saw nine B-25s target the port of Hong Gay, east of Haiphong, where the bombers claimed a large freighter sunk and two more damaged. The next day, six Mitchells struck Tien Ho airfield once again, claiming more than 40 aircraft destroyed on the ground. Another six B-25s returned to Canton on 25 November to bomb shipping in the Pearl River, claiming one large cargo vessel sunk and damage to several smaller ships. In the largest CATF raid to date, ten B-25s with an escort of 21 P-40s struck shipping off Canton again on 27 November, claiming two freighters sunk and several more damaged in the face of defending Japanese fighters. The bombers also had two fighters confirmed destroyed and two probably destroyed.

Radio-gunner Pvt Jack Gould points to damage inflicted by a Japanese fighter on his B-25 possibly during the 27 November 1942 raid on Canton. That day, now TSgt Adam Williams, engineer-gunner in this aeroplane, received credit for a 'Zero' shot down (*3A-73963, RG342H, NARA*)

For the next six weeks the 11th BS went back to bombing targets in northeastern Burma, where the Japanese were building up their forces on the Salween front. After a final mission on 16 January

Officers of the 11th BS in China in the autumn of 1942. By this time the unit had started painting the squadron insignia (the cartoon character 'Mr Jiggs') on the noses of its B-25s. This emblem dated back to the 11th BS's service in France during World War 1 (*Courtesy Carl Molesworth*)

1943, bomber operations came to a complete halt for 33 days due to a shortage of fuel – another recurring frustration for the medium bombers operating in China. By this point the 11th BS had flown 62 missions for the loss of only one aircraft in combat.

Bombing operations resumed at the end of February against a background of significant organisational changes for the USAAF units in the CBI. For some months Claire Chennault, with strong support from Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek, had been arguing for an independent air force in China separate from the Tenth Air Force. Chennault believed that with 500 fighters and bombers he could destroy the Japanese air forces in China, conduct a campaign to cripple vital enemy shipping in the South China Sea and open the way for the capture of a port on the China coast as a base for the future invasion of the Japanese home islands. In contrast, Gen Stilwell proposed a ground campaign to recapture northern Burma and build a road from Assam to China to supply and re-equip the Chinese armed forces. The difficulty with Stilwell's plan was that it would take time, while Chennault could offer more immediate support to China through an air offensive. Immediacy won the day, and President Franklin Roosevelt agreed to the Generalissimo's request.

The crew of B-25C *GOPHER* photographed during the 33-day halt to bombing operations due to a shortage of fuel. The squadrons in China were entirely dependent on supplies flown over the 'Hump' route. In early 1943 the amount of materiel that could be flown in was woefully inadequate. Later in the year *GOPHER* served as a training aircraft for pilots of the CACW's medium bomber squadrons (*3A-01475, RG342H, NARA*)

Chennault duly received command of the Fourteenth Air Force, activated on 10 March 1943. At the Trident Conference in May, he was promised a full medium bombardment group, an additional fighter group and a medium bomber group, as well as fighter groups for the Republic of China Air Force (ROCAF) that would operate under Chennault's command. Gen Henry H 'Hap' Arnold, Commanding General of the USAAF, proposed transferring units from the Tenth Air Force in India to China, but he would not authorise these moves until sufficient tonnage to sustain the units could be carried over the 'Hump' route.

The success of Chennault's plan for a significantly greater air offensive in China rested on two critical assumptions. First, that American transport aircraft could carry adequate supplies over the 'Hump' for his expanded air force, and second, that the Chinese armies could defend the air bases he planned to use in central and eastern China. Stilwell feared that if Chennault's air offensive proved to be successful, the Japanese would not remain idle against this threat and would likely launch an offensive against his air bases. Chennault doubted the Japanese would do so, and felt confident with Chiang's promise to use his Chinese armies to defend Chennault's air bases.

The transition from the CATF to the Fourteenth Air Force had little impact on the 11th BS, which had received some newer B-25Ds to bring its strength up to 12 aircraft (seven B-25Cs and five B-25Ds as of the end of February 1943). It flew only five missions between the end of February and the end of May, however, partly due to shortages of fuel and persistent poor weather. On the two missions flown in May, the B-25s combined their effort with the newly arrived B-24s of the 308th BG, first to bomb the docks at Haiphong on the 4th and, four days later, to attack the Japanese airfields at Tien Ho and White Cloud, the latter in Hong Kong. On this mission the 11th BS lost a B-25 when its bombs exploded prematurely over the target. During June the operational tempo picked up again, with the 11th flying six missions in support of Chinese forces resisting the Japanese incursion westward from the Tung-ting Lake area toward Changsha and bombing airfields the Imperial Japanese Army Air Force (IJAAF) was using to launch attacks on Fourteenth Air Force bases at Kunming and Kweilin.

In July Chennault ordered his heavy and medium bombers to prioritise attacks against Japanese shipping and harbour installations, although enemy airfields continued to be targeted. Chennault had long considered enemy vessels to be a profitable target, as merchant ships travelled along the China coast bringing supplies to Japanese forces in Southeast Asia and critical raw materials back to Japan for its war industries. These shipping lanes would be within reach of medium bombers flying from airfields in eastern China. Even before Chennault issued his directive for operations in July, the 11th BS had begun moving aircraft and personnel to the airfield at Kweilin from its main base at Kunming. Initially, this was for a few weeks of detached service, but with the start of the anti-shipping campaign the move effectively became permanent.

The first mission flown in July was a combined effort against barges on the Yangtze River and installations on the Japanese airfield at Pailuchi on the 7th, with three bombers attacking the barges and three hitting storage areas on the airfield. The next day, seven B-25s with an escort of 22 P-40s bombed three ships moored in the Whampoa Docks in Canton. Shortly thereafter, more crews and B-25Ds arrived to boost the 11th BS's strength up to 18 B-25s, with five C- and 13 D-models. After a lull of two weeks, the mediums carried out two

An 11th BS B-25 flies over the hills on the way back to Kunming. The combination of bad weather and mountainous terrain such as this proved deadly to many B-25 crews during the war in China (*Courtesy Carl Molesworth*)

During World War 2 Hong Kong was a major port and transhipment point for the Japanese. Imperial Japanese Navy and merchant ships would stop here on their way to and from Japan and Southeast Asian ports. The 11th BS twice bombed shipping and dock areas here at the end of July 1943 (*3A-02672, RG342H, NARA*)

missions to bomb the Japanese airfield at Hankow. The mission on 25 July was uneventful, but the next day the B-25s and their escort ran into determined fighter opposition – probably Ki-43 'Oscars' from the 25th and 33rd Sentais, who shuttled between defending the Canton area and Hankow. In a battle that began on the bombing run and continued until the B-25s were more than 100 miles southwest of Hankow, the Japanese fighters kept up their attacks on the Mitchell formations and their escorts, fortunately without damage to the bombers. The B-25 gunners submitted claims for five fighters confirmed and another six probably destroyed, these figures giving a good indication of the intensity of the combat. TSgt Charles Patton received credit for three confirmed and an additional three probables.

On 27 July six aircraft flew to Hong Kong to target a large freighter moored near Stonecutter's Island, but missed.

For the first two weeks of August bad weather brought operations to a halt. Medium bomber missions resumed on 20 August when, following an early morning Japanese fighter sweep over Hengyang and Kweilin that cost the Fourteenth Air Force three P-40s, six B-25s went to bomb Tien Ho airfield, where the Japanese fighters involved were based. The bombers and their escort came under continuous attack, probably from Ki-44 'Tojos' of the 85th Sentai that had flown the fighter sweep over Hengyang and Kweilin that morning. The B-25 gunners received credit for one fighter confirmed destroyed and one probable. The next day seven B-25s attacked the airfield at Hankow (the other major Japanese fighter base in China), coming in after the B-24s of the 308th BG had targeted the city, losing two aircraft and having a further ten damaged to IJAAF fighters. The B-25s bombed without interference and may have destroyed several enemy fighters on the ground.

Six Mitchells attacked the airfield at Wuchang, across from Hankow, on 24 August again without interference, while the B-24s bombed Hankow itself, losing four of the seven aircraft involved. After a mission to bomb shipping at Whampoa docks in Canton, five B-25s went back to Tien Ho airfield on 26 August, where they again ran into a host of Japanese fighters including some 'Tojos' from the 85th Sentai that gave the bombers and their P-40 escort a hard time. Two of the gunners claimed one fighter each, and four more were credited with probables. At the end of the month six B-25s bombed the Japanese airfield at Ichang in a continuation of the anti-IJAAF effort.

The pace of flying increased during September, with the 11th BS completing 16 missions. The targets for these missions ran the gamut of objectives for the air offensive against that Japanese, covering airfields, military installations, dock areas and shipping, and, for the first time, railway marshalling yards. The most important development during the month was a radical change in tactics in the war against Japanese shipping. Up to this point in the campaign, all missions against shipping had targeted vessels in harbours and in dock areas, using flights of four to

eight B-25s bombing from medium altitudes. Now the Mitchells were to conduct sea sweeps to find and attack enemy ships that were underway, which had not been done before.

Making their attacks at low level, the 11th's principal mission profile involved sending the B-25s out in pairs. When the aircraft acquired a target, the lead Mitchell would go in strafing while the second B-25 bombed, then the roles would be reversed. The Fourteenth Air Force assigned the B-25s an area running from Haiphong, across the Gulf of Tonkin to Hong Kong and north to Shanghai, while the longer-range B-24s covered the areas farther out to sea.

11th FS CO Lt Col Morris Taber carried out the first sea sweep on 27 September, and this mission graphically illustrated the risks associated with such operations. Taking off from Kweilin, Taber and his operations officer, Capt L J Murphy, refuelled at Nanning to carry out a sweep over the Gulf of Tonkin. Taber found a 150–200-ft tanker and proceeded to make three attacks on the vessel, the first two coming in at an altitude of 100 ft and the third at mast height. He dropped two bombs on his first run but missed the ship. On his second run he scored a near miss, and on the third run his bomb exploded under the ship. The crew abandoned the vessel, although it apparently did not sink. Murphy's B-25 did not return from the mission, however. Weeks later Murphy and all bar two of his crew made it back to Kweilin. Their aircraft had crashed into the sea, killing two of the crew, with the three survivors being rescued by a Chinese junk.

Sea sweeps dominated the 11th FS's operations during October, the unit completing 13 missions against shipping. The first sea sweep on 7 October saw four B-25s return with claims of three direct hits on a 200-ft freighter, leaving the vessel burning and listing. It too failed to sink, however. Two days later, two B-25s on a sea sweep attacked a 140-ft patrol boat, claiming some damage. Later that day two more B-25s attacked a 150-ft tanker, which they claimed as sunk. Returning to the coast, the two aircraft strafed a lighthouse, but on the second pass Lt Daniel Manley's B-25 crashed into a hill probably as a result of ground fire. The crew were all killed. On 13 October Lt Col Taber took two B-25s on a sea sweep, finding no vessels in the shipping lanes but several in the harbour at Amoy. Taber and his wingman made an attack out of the sun, getting two direct hits on a freighter that broke in half (post-war records confirm the loss of the *Daigen Maru No 8* on this date at this location). Having seen several ships in the harbour, Taber returned to Amoy the next day with four B-25s. While two of the bombers came in at medium altitude as a diversion, two approached at low level, getting hits on several freighters.

A sea sweep on 25 October damaged two more vessels. The missions flown the following day enjoyed more success, resulting in the confirmed sinking of two ships, but at the cost of two B-25s. In the morning, two Mitchells on the first sweep found several ships in the small harbour of Kiungshan, on the north coast of Hainan Island in the Hainan Strait. The first aircraft achieved direct hits on a 300-ft freighter, claiming it as sunk, and damaged a 250-ft tanker, while the second aircraft dropped three bombs on a tanker, which blew up and sank.

That afternoon, Lt Col Taber led four aircraft back to Kiungshan for a repeat attack on the remaining ships in the harbour. Taber and his wingman

In the autumn of 1943 the Fourteenth Air Force began a campaign against Japanese merchant shipping – one of Chennault's primary objectives for his small force. 1Lt George Grottle of the 11th BS caught this freighter in Hong Kong harbour on 16 November 1943 (*3A-2642, RG342H, NARA*)

made separate low-level attacks on the ships, but as the former pulled off his run he noticed a 'Nick' twin-engined fighter preparing to take off from a nearby airfield. Taber went down and strafed the Ki-45, setting its right wing tanks on fire with the 0.50-cal machine guns fitted in the nose of his aircraft. He then saw six single-engined fighters, which he identified as 'Zekes' (as most American airman identified any Japanese single-engined fighter), preparing to take off. He called on the other bombers to strafe the 'Zekes' before they could get airborne, but the remaining pilots were involved in their bombing runs on the ships at that time. Flying alone, Taber circled the harbour and came back in toward the airfield to meet one of the Japanese fighters head-on. Both aircraft opened fire and the 'Zeke' passed below the B-25. Coming in over the airfield again, Taber strafed a parked fighter and ordered his bombers to cease their attacks and head north. One of the B-25s joined up with him and the two headed back to Kweilin.

Meanwhile, Lt Edgar Gentry had made several passes against the ships before he spotted a 'Zeke' coming at him head-on, firing. Gentry dove down to get under the Japanese fighter, and as it passed over the B-25 the top turret gunner fired several bursts into the 'Zeke' and saw it flip over onto its back and crash into the sea. Shortly thereafter, his gunner saw another 'Zeke' attack a Mitchell until its left wing broke off outboard of the engine nacelle, causing the bomber to plummet into the sea too. 2Lt Herbert Hempe and his crew were killed. Gentry escaped to join up with Lt Col Taber.

Capt Don Milam had completed his attacks on the ships when two 'Zekes' bounced his B-25, wounding the co-pilot, knocking out an engine and riddling the bomber with holes. Although Milam managed to escape, he could not feather the propeller on the damaged engine. When his remaining engine started to lose power, Milam ordered the crew to bail out, fortunately over Chinese territory.

CHINESE-AMERICAN COMPOSITE WING

For more than a year, the 11th BS had been operating on its own as the only medium bomber squadron in China when reinforcements finally arrived in early November in the form of the 2nd BS of the 1st Bombardment Group (Medium) Provisional, CACW. In demanding 500 aeroplanes and an independent air force command for Chennault, Chiang Kai-shek had also requested aircraft to rebuild the depleted ROCAF. Chennault had proposed to Arnold that a Chinese fighter group and medium bomber group be formed for this purpose, using American and Chinese personnel in joint command.

Approval of this proposal led to the formation of a Chinese-American Operational Training Unit at Malir airfield, near Karachi, during July-August 1943, equipped with older P-40s and six B-25Cs withdrawn from combat with the 11th BS in China. American-trained Chinese pilots and ground staff arrived to form the new squadrons, with pilots drawn from the ROCAF. The medium bomber pilots and their crews underwent an intensive eight-week training programme, covering transition training, formation flying, navigation, medium altitude and skip bombing, and flexible and fixed gunnery. The 1st BG was authorised four medium bomber squadrons, but since the training programme could accommodate only one medium bomber squadron at a time, completing the eight-week programme for all four squadrons and moving them to China took some months and stretched into 1944.

The first medium bomber crews to finish their training made up the 2nd Bombardment Squadron (Medium) Provisional, which was activated on 11 October 1943 shortly after the formation of the CACW. With 12 new B-25Ds recently arrived from the USA, the 2nd BS began its transfer to China on 21 October when a small number of aircraft and crews flew on to Kweilin to commence operations with the 11th BS.

The 2nd's first mission took place on 4 November when squadron CO Maj Thomas Foley and one other crew joined two B-25s from the 11th BS on a sea sweep. One of the 11th BS aircraft had to turn back, but the remaining three attacked ships in Swatow harbour, with one crew claiming a 300-ft freighter sunk. Foley, meanwhile, hit a 200-ft freighter and claimed it as probably sunk. His wingman, 2Lt C K Kao, who had made several strafing passes over the ships, crashed on the return flight, killing all the crew.

The crews assigned to the 1st Bombardment Group (Medium) Provisional of the CACW began their training at Malir Field, near Karachi, in August 1943. The Fourteenth Air Force provided six older B-25Cs that had been withdrawn from combat, including *GOPHER*, formerly of the 11th BS (*Courtesy Carl Molesworth*)

The 2nd Bombardment Squadron (Medium) Provisional was the first CACW medium bomber unit to enter combat, beginning in November 1943. Here, Capt William Carson walks to his aircraft with his Chinese crew at Erh Tong, near Kweilin. Flying many sea sweeps over the South China Sea, Carson became one of the CACW's highest scorers against Japanese shipping, with claims of 15,000 tons sunk. He would command the 2nd BS from July to September 1944 (*RG208-AA-Box 109 Air-Planes (Army)-B-25 Crews, NARA*)

Later that same day a B-25 from the 2nd BS joined one from the 11th BS on a sea sweep in poor weather. The aircraft attacked ships in the harbour at Fort Bayard, on the China coast, but on the return flight both crews made force landings due to their inability to find their way back to Kweilin in poor weather.

For the next several weeks Foley and his flight commanders flew missions with the 11th BS to gain experience, the unit undertaking three sea sweeps after 4 November. On each occasion it despatched one aircraft from the 11th and one from the 2nd BS. Earlier that same month the Japanese had launched an offensive west of the Tung-ting Lake area towards Chang-te, primarily to capture stocks of rice to supply the IJA in China. Heavy rains initially protected the advancing forces from aerial attack, but the weather cleared sufficiently on 12 November to allow the 2nd and the 11th BSs to fly six missions against Japanese-occupied towns supporting the advance.

The first mission of the day saw eight aircraft from the 11th BS and two from the 2nd BS attack the railway marshalling yards at Yochow, on the line that ran south from Hankow. The 11th returned here in the afternoon to bomb warehouses. The squadron had recently acquired three B-25G models that were each equipped with a 75 mm cannon in the nose, and on the last mission of the day two of the G-models flew to Yochow to bomb and strafe the town from low level, despite heavy anti-aircraft fire. One of the Mitchells was hit in the right engine and crashed ten miles south of the town.

The rest of the month was devoted to sea sweeps, usually with one aircraft from each squadron covering a section of the shipping lanes. Crews returned from these missions with claims for a number of cargo ships and other vessels sunk or badly damaged. On one mission the two B-25s found no ships, but 1Lt George Grottle of the 11th BS sighted an Imperial Japanese Navy Air Force (IJNAF) Showa L2D 'Topsy' transport aircraft (a license-built version of the Douglas DC-3). He shot it down using his front guns and the top turret.

The most important mission of the month took place on 25 November, when 14 B-25s (eight from the 11th BS and six from the 2nd BS) carried out the first attack on Japanese-held Formosa, the bombers having an escort of P-38 Lightnings and P-51 Mustangs. The Mitchells went in at 1000 ft, dropping fragmentation bombs across the airfield at Shinchiku. When the bombers had finished, the Mustangs went in to strafe the target area. Together, the bombers and fighters submitted claims for 42 enemy aeroplanes destroyed.

The last month of the year saw the two medium bomber squadrons active virtually every day. December began with three combined raids on the shipyards in Kowloon. The 11th BS then spent nearly three weeks supporting the Chinese armies resisting the Japanese offensive. When the important town of Chang-te fell to the IJA, the 11th carried out seven missions to bomb Japanese positions in the town, helping the Chinese to re-occupy it on 9 December. For the next 13 days, as enemy troops began to retreat to their original positions, the squadron flew regular medium altitude bombing missions against Japanese-held towns supporting the IJA. Mitchells would cover the designated target areas with 100-lb demolition bombs while Fourteenth Air Force fighters did their own bombing and strafing in support of the Chinese armies.

The airfields at Hankow and Wuchang were also attacked during three night missions. One, on 13 December, saw aircraft target Wuchang with the assistance of a dedicated B-25 pathfinder, which dropped incendiaries on the airfield and then parachute flares a few minutes before five Mitchells came in to deliver their ordnance by the light of the flares and the fires below.

The final few days of the month saw the squadron make three successful river sweeps along the Yangtze, using bombs and 75 mm shells to claim five large craft sunk and five more damaged.

The 2nd BS initially accompanied the 11th BS on many of the missions, attacking Japanese-held towns, railway marshalling yards and airfields. However, from the middle of December, the squadron took over most of the sea sweep missions. It claimed seven ships sunk or probably sunk and one Mitsubishi Ki-46 'Dinah' reconnaissance aircraft shot down before year-end.

By 1 January 1943 the 11th BS had completed 216 missions since its first effort on 3 June 1942, while the newly arrived 2nd BS had flown 58 missions. The outlook for the medium bomber squadrons seemed promising, as they had contributed materially to the destruction of Japanese shipping in-theatre. Indeed, by the end of 1943 the Fourteenth Air Force's medium and heavy bombers had claimed more than 200,000 tons of enemy ships sunk, with many more vessels damaged to varying degrees. Post-war analysis, however, would show that the actual figure amounted to only around one quarter of the amount claimed. The Fourteenth Air Force's support for the Chinese divisions resisting the Japanese attempt to capture Chang-te, in which the medium bombers had played a major role, appeared to be a re-affirmation of the belief that the combination of American air power and Chinese ground forces could defeat Japanese incursions.

More importantly, additional medium bomber squadrons were on their way to China. The 1st BG's 1st BS had nearly completed its training in India and would soon be heading for the frontline, to be followed in time by the 3rd and 4th BSs. Chennault had also been notified that two medium bomb squadrons would be transferred to China from India at the end of January 1944, giving him a potential force of six medium bomber squadrons with which to continue his assault on the IJA in China and Japanese merchant shipping.

INDIA AIR TASK FORCE OPERATIONS

The departure of the 11th BS for China in June 1942, with crews transferred in from the 22nd BS to bring the unit up to full strength, had left the Tenth Air Force with a skeleton medium bomber squadron equipped with fewer than 12 Mitchells. The remaining aircrew in the 22nd BS were temporarily attached to the 7th BG's headquarters squadron.

While with the latter unit, the 22nd carried out coastal patrols from Karachi and single aircraft reconnaissance missions into Burma. On 31 May a B-25 from the squadron made a solo reconnaissance to Rangoon (almost certainly the first Mitchell combat mission in the CBI), reporting nine Japanese ships moored in the river near the Rangoon docks. During June the 22nd BS flew several more missions into Burma, including one undertaken by 2Lt Clarke Johnston against enemy facilities in the coastal town of Akyab, on the Bay of Bengal. During a low-level strafing attack, Japanese anti-aircraft fire killed a member of his crew and knocked out an engine. Although Johnston immediately set a course for India, he had to ditch his bomber 21 miles off the coast. The crew succeeded in rowing their rubber life raft back to shore, where they survived on coconuts and emergency rations until rescued.

Later that same month a single B-25 on a reconnaissance mission to Rangoon came under attack from three Japanese fighters, but the crew evaded their attackers and dove away at top speed, out-running their pursuers.

In June 1942 the US and British governments had adopted the Arnold-Towers-Portal agreement on the allocation and deployment of USAAF aircraft to different British and combined Allied theatres around the world. The agreement specified that the USAAF would allocate one heavy bomber group of four squadrons with 35 aircraft and one full

A B-25C from the 22nd BS flies over central Burma. The 22nd was the first squadron from the 341st BG to see combat, flying its first mission on 14 December 1942. Since the squadrons rarely flew together they did not adopt a numbering system. Most B-25s carried just the squadron insignia on the nose and the aircraft's serial number on the tail for identification (*3A-33765, RG342H, NARA*)

medium bomber group of four squadrons with 57 aircraft for service with the Tenth Air Force, in addition to two fighter groups. This decision led to the activation of the 341st Bombardment Group (Medium) at Karachi on 15 September 1942. That same day the 11th and 22nd BSs were transferred from the 7th BG to the 341st BG. To bring the latter group up to its assigned strength, the War Department activated two new units in-theatre in the form of the 490th and 491st Bombardment Squadrons (Medium). It took time to fill out these squadrons with a full complement of aircraft, crews and support personnel. Indeed, they remained non-operational until early 1943.

With the monsoon weather over Burma and northeast India coming to an end, Brig Gen Clayton Bissell, who had replaced Brereton as commander of the Tenth Air Force, decided to group his new units into a formation similar to the CATF to direct combat operations over India and Burma. This became the India Air Task Force (IATF), activated on 3 October 1942. Few of the IATF's units were close to full strength in respect to either men or aeroplanes. On activation the IATF had only 25 B-25Cs, split between China and India, although the War Department had promised that new B-25Ds were on the way.

While the primary mission of the IATF was to defend the air bases in Assam that supported the air route over the 'Hump', Bissell had every intention that his meagre bomber force would undertake offensive missions into Burma as soon as they were able. The task assigned to the heavy and medium bombers was to prevent the movement and supply of Japanese forces in northern Burma that could threaten the airlift to China. This was a campaign of interdiction that would last until the end of the war in Burma, involving relentless attacks on Japanese lines of communication and stores of supplies.

The IJA in-country was critically dependent on the Burmese rail system. The British had destroyed many of the craft that carried supplies north up the Irrawaddy and Chindwin Rivers, reducing the ability of the Japanese to use these waterways to transport supplies to their units at the front. In 1942 the rail system in Burma comprised 2000 miles of single track lines that ran from Rangoon north to Mandalay, with branch lines that covered most of central and northern Burma as far as Lashio and Myitkyina. Marshalling yards and junctions along the length of the system served as transhipment points and as supply and repair depots. These became lucrative targets.

The Japanese used Rangoon as their main port, off-loading supplies there for shipment north via the railway line. There were many vulnerable points along the length of the rail system, with more than 100 bridges that were 200 ft long or greater and a small number of larger ones that were vital to the system. These became priority targets. Knocking out the bridges caused delays and disruptions to the IJA supply effort, with bomber units discovering that the best way to maximise this was to 'drop' several bridges at a time so that locomotives, rolling stock and supplies built up at the railway junctions and marshalling yards, which could then be bombed to much greater effect. However, B-25 crews soon found out that, to their mounting frustration, destroying a bridge was exceedingly difficult.

Bissell assigned targets to his bombers according to their range. The heavy bombers of the 7th BG took on the task of denying the port of Rangoon to

Japanese shipping and attacking rail targets in southern Burma, while the B-25 medium bombers of the 341st BG were charged with interdicting the enemy's lines of communication and supply dumps in central Burma as far as Mandalay. Still, cutting the flow of supplies to any significant degree took more aeroplanes and more raids on bridges and marshalling yards than the USAAF and the RAF were capable of mounting during 1943. Allied intelligence estimated that the Burmese rail system could carry around 900 tons of supplies a day. As previously noted, the IJA consumed less than its western counterparts, so that its divisions and IJAAF units in Burma required a little over 600 tons a day – well within the capacity of the local rail system.

While the 22nd BS spent time training new crews and waiting for additional aircraft and personnel to bring the unit up to strength, the China-based 11th BS maintained a detachment of two B-25s at Dinjan to carry out reconnaissance and the occasional bombing mission over northern Burma. Flying singly or in pairs, sometimes with an escort of P-40s, the detachment flew 27 missions during July and August and a further 15 in September. Often the single aircraft would combine reconnaissance with bombing, hitting IJA supply dumps, barracks, bridges, airfields and railway facilities. The bombers made regular attacks on the airfield at Myitkyina, where the IJAAF could base fighters and bombers for raids on the Assam airfields, trying to keep the runway inoperable. Occasionally, the B-25 crews encountered river craft and trains, which they bombed and strafed using the 0.50-cal guns in the top turret and the 0.30-cal machine gun in the nose.

A priority target in the interdiction campaign against the Japanese line of communications in Burma was the bridge system carrying the railway line north from Rangoon. Bridges proved to be exceptionally difficult targets to hit from medium altitude. The 341st BG's squadrons flew many missions against the important Myitnge railway bridge, shown here, without much success. Even a near miss would often fail to damage such a target (*3A-37703, RG342H, NARA*)

In early December, although still short of aircraft, the 22nd BS transferred its seven B-25Cs from Karachi to Chakulia, west of Calcutta. This would be the squadron's base for the next year. For missions into central Burma, the 22nd would often stage through Argartala, an RAF base closer to the Burmese theatre, where the B-25s would refuel both before and after the mission.

The 22nd BS flew its first mission from Chakulia on 14 December when six aircraft bombed the railway junction at Myohaung, near Mandalay. The unit returned to this target exactly one week later, dropping ordnance from 16,000 ft and recording hits on both goods wagons and the tracks on which they were sat. On 22 December the squadron bombed the marshalling yards at Sagaing, 12 miles from Mandalay, and ended the month with a three-aircraft attack on the airfield at Shwebo.

Still with only six B-25s, the 22nd completed 12 missions during January. By the end of the month it had just three serviceable aircraft. In a foretaste of what would become a standard, but frustrating, practice, the unit flew three missions against the important railway bridge at Myitnge, damaging the structure and its approaches, but never seriously enough to put the bridge out of operation. The 22nd went back to the bridge on three separate occasions in February, with the same results. On all of these missions the B-25s bombed from medium altitude (13,000–16,000 ft), dropping combinations of 500- and 1000-lb demolition bombs.

Fortunately for the all but spent 22nd BS, the 490th and 491st BSs began moving from Karachi to bases near Calcutta at the end of December. The 491st was the first to begin flying combat missions, with three of its nine B-25Cs joining the 22nd BS in an attack on the Myitnge railway bridge on 10 January 1943, returning again on 27 January with three aircraft. On 4 February the 491st again joined the 22nd in another attack on the Myitnge bridge, dropping 40 300-lb demolition bombs on the structure, this time from 6000 ft. The squadrons returned the next day, registering some hits on the bridge itself and the approaches, and again on 14 February when the bombing resulted in near misses only.

Shortly thereafter, a new target emerged for the medium bombers in the form of the Gokteik viaduct – a vital bridge on the railway line to Lashio. Built by the Pennsylvania and Maryland Bridge Construction Company in 1900, this steel structure measured more than 2000 ft in length in order to carry the tracks over a deep ravine. Its destruction would have cut off all rail traffic to northeast Burma, hence its strategic importance. But the Gokteik viaduct, too, proved to be an exceptionally difficult target to destroy.

The 7th BG tried without success on 20 February 1943, with the medium bombers making their first attempt three days later when four aircraft from the 490th BS joined eight from the 22nd BS to drop 1000-lb bombs from 3400 ft, unfortunately without result. Returning to the viaduct the next day, 12 Mitchells from all three squadrons experienced their first encounter with Japanese fighters when four Ki-43 'Oscars' attacked the formation for 30 minutes. The co-pilot in the 491st BS's lead aircraft was killed and another crewman wounded. The bombers' gunners claimed one 'Oscar' probably destroyed and one damaged in return.

Between March and May 1943, the 341st BG would make an additional 13 attacks on the Myitnge bridge and

Railway marshalling yards were another priority target for the medium bombers. Here, bombs are going down on the marshalling yard and junction at Naba in central Burma. Several lines of rolling stock can be seen. The IJA became adept at repairing marshalling yards and bridges, requiring the bombers to make frequent return visits (*3A-37709, RG342H, NARA*)

six more on the Gokteik viaduct, adding the important Mu River bridge to its list of frequent places to visit.

Railway marshalling yards in central Burma were also regularly attacked by the medium bombers, and the B-25s devoted more effort to these targets than to any other. The 490th BS made its combat debut on 18 February when it sent six aircraft, along with single B-25s from the 22nd and 491st BSs, to bomb the marshalling yards at Sagaing.

At this time the 341st BG had too few aircraft to inflict permanent damage to such a target, with less than 40 B-25s available for most of the first half of 1943. Furthermore, the Japanese proved adept at making speedy repairs, which meant that these targets had to be bombed repeatedly. Missions rarely saw more than 12 Mitchells participating, and often in order for the group to get this many bombers over the target all three of its squadrons had to contribute several aircraft each. Only in April, by which time more B-25Ds had arrived (the 341st BG had 36 C- and five D-models assigned, of which 35 were ready for combat operations), could the squadrons begin to send out nine aircraft each on a single mission.

With three flights of three aircraft, the squadrons could begin covering a target more comprehensively, with each flight assigned a different part of a marshalling yard or the warehouses nearby, bombing from medium altitudes. The squadrons relied on photo intelligence to determine when to strike a railway facility. The aerial photos would often show when there was a build-up of rolling stock in the yards, this usually being caused by aerial attacks that had inflicted damage further up the line.

On occasion the B-25s got lucky. This happened on 7 April 1943, for example, when the 22nd and the 491st BSs went to bomb the marshalling yards at Ywataung, west of Mandalay on the branch line to Myitkyina, and found more than 300 goods wagons stored there. The 22nd BS attacked first, dropping 68 300-lb bombs and placing 65 of them into the target area, hitting the tracks and engine sheds and damaging many of the wagons. A bombsight malfunction caused most of the 491st BS's bombs to miss the target, however. When the 490th BS went to Ywataung two days later, it found that the Japanese had not finished their repairs and many wagons were still stuck in the yards. The squadron duly destroyed many more. During 1943 the B-25s would carry out 23 missions against the marshalling yards at Ywataung and Sagaing.

Inevitably, with the increasing number of missions flown into central Burma, the B-25s ran into newer Ki-43-II 'Oscars' from the 50th and 64th Sentais. It seems that the 490th BS bore the brunt of these attacks. On 25 March nine Mitchells from the unit targeted a runway, barracks and a large convoy reported near the town of Meiktila, in central Burma. After completing their bombing run, the formation came under attack from five 'Oscars' from the 50th Sentai. The bombers fought back and claimed two fighters probably destroyed. In fact, the gunners did shoot down a fighter, whose pilot had to bail out. The 50th Sentai in return claimed all nine B-25s shot down in a major victory. In fact, the bombers suffered next to no damage.

The 22nd BS was next, running into a formation of 'Oscars' on 20 April that were escorting an IJAAF bomber formation. Three fighters broke off to attack the Mitchells, but without damaging the American aircraft.

The B-25 gunners claimed two fighters damaged. A week later the unit had another run-in with the Ki-43s while bombing the marshalling yards at Thazi, the fighters inflicting slight damage on a B-25. The 490th BS bombed Thazi shortly thereafter, and also ran into the 'Oscars', who made what the aircrews called 'half-hearted' attacks on the formation for 30 minutes, damaging three of the bombers. The gunners claimed one probable and two damaged. The 491st BS came under attack on a mission on 8 May, but again its aircraft escaped without being hit, with claims of three fighters damaged in return.

The B-25s were not as fortunate on their next encounter, however. On a return mission to the marshalling yards at Thazi on 13 May, the 490th BS came under attack from 15 'Oscars' from the 50th Sentai during its bombing run. This time the fighters aggressively pressed home their attacks for an hour as the formation made its way back to India. The bombers found that turning into head-on passes proved effective as it increased the closure rate, thus limiting exposure to the fighter's guns. Still, the lead aircraft of the second flight went down under the attack and crashed, killing the crew. A second B-25 had an engine shot out and made a crash-landing at an RAF airfield. Although the bomber was written off the crew survived uninjured. Three more B-25s received damage. Bomber gunners claimed two fighters destroyed and two probables, with several more damaged. They did indeed cause one IJAAF pilot to bail out of his crippled fighter.

Eight days later, the 490th BS had the misfortune to run into a large dogfight between RAF Hurricanes and Ki-43s from the 64th Sentai that were carrying out a fighter sweep. The 'Oscars' made repeated coordinated attacks on the B-25 formation, knocking down one Mitchell and damaging five others. The gunners claimed five fighters destroyed, three probables and six damaged, although the 64th Sentai suffered no losses.

The onset of the monsoon season in May brought about a reduction in missions. Lasting until the end of September, the monsoon brought torrential rains to eastern India, the Burma coast along the Bay of Bengal and southern Burma. Central Burma, where the medium bombers carried out most of their missions, is somewhat dryer, but still subject to rain and cloud cover. The 341st BG would often have to send out an aircraft on a weather reconnaissance mission to see if conditions over central Burma were passable for bombing. While there was a dip in the operational tempo in June, the B-25s went back to flying more than 40 missions a month during July and August, and pushed this past the 50-mark during September as the monsoon came to an end. With more aeroplanes and aircrews available, the 341st BG began sending out two and sometimes three squadrons to bomb the same target, one squadron following the other several minutes after the first had completed its bombing run.

During the monsoon the squadrons went back to their now familiar targets, bombing the Myitnge and Mu River bridges on several occasions. They achieved hits that knocked out spans on the bridges for a few days at a time. Marshalling yards were the other main target, and in a new tactic, the squadrons began making sweeps to blow up sections of track, rolling stock and buildings along the lines, as well as attacking the marshalling yards themselves. Sometimes the B-25s would go down and strafe a target after bombing it if the flak risk was low. To this end, the 490th BS had

The 341st BS began adding fixed machine guns in the nose compartments of its B-25C/Ds to enable them to strafe targets on sweeps over the Burmese railway system. This 490th BS Mitchell has six 0.50-cal machine guns mounted in the nose, with the weapons angled downward so that the B-25 could strafe at a flatter angle of approach (*3A-01075, RG342H, NARA*)

started to fit fixed 0.50-cal machine guns in the noses of their C- and D-model Mitchells.

There was growing evidence that the bombing campaign against the rail network in Burma was beginning to have an effect. The extent of damage to marshalling yards that went without being repaired indicated that the enemy were having to devote greater effort and more resources to keeping the main lines open and running.

The end of the monsoon brought organisational changes affecting the 341st BG. Gen 'Hap' Arnold had initially proposed to Stilwell that when the 311th Bombardment Group (Dive) arrived in India (where it was re-designated the 311th Fighter-Bomber Group), the India-based squadrons of the 341st BG could be transferred to the Fourteenth Air Force in China to join the 11th BS. However, only the 22nd and 491st BSs would be sent to China, leaving the 490th BS in India with the Tenth Air Force. The 22nd and 491st BSs stopped flying missions during November 1943 in preparation for their move, only to resume operations during December when their transfer to China was delayed until January 1944. This would leave only a single USAAF medium bomber squadron with the Tenth Air Force, but a decision was reached to transfer an American medium bomber group from the Mediterranean Theatre of Operations in 1944 to make up for the loss of the two squadrons to China.

In October the IATF was inactivated when the headquarters of the Tenth Air Force, now under the command of Maj Gen Howard Davidson, moved to Calcutta to be closer to the action. The Tenth also came under a new command, namely Army Air Forces, India-Burma Sector, led by Maj Gen George Stratemeyer. The biggest change, however, was the

creation of Air Command, South East Asia, in December 1943, bringing RAF and USAAF units in India into a coordinated Allied air command at the insistence of Adm Lord Louis Mountbatten, who had been appointed Supreme Allied Commander, South East Asia Command. In the new Allied air command Air Chief Marshall Sir Richard Peirse became Air Officer Commanding, Air Command, South East Asia, while Stratemeyer was made commander of the newly created Eastern Air Command. It controlled Third Tactical Air Force, which was comprised of USAAF and RAF fighters and fighter-bombers, the Strategic Air Force consisting of USAAF and RAF heavy and medium bombers, including the 490th BS, and air transport and photographic reconnaissance units. Under the new structure the Tenth Air Force became an administrative command.

Although the bombing campaign against the Burmese railway system could point to some progress in reducing its efficiency, there was a growing recognition that with the limited number of aeroplanes available, it would be difficult to inflict lasting damage that was beyond the capacity of the Japanese to repair. Instead, it appeared as if the more profitable targets were the locomotives and rolling stock using the rail system. Locomotives, though hard to destroy, were a particularly valuable target as there were rarely more than 100 in operation in all of Burma, with little likelihood that these could be replaced if destroyed. Even inflicting severe damage to a locomotive would put it out of service and limit the capacity of the railway system.

The Mitchell crews had been using their aircrafts' 0.50-cal nose guns for strafing, but in early November the 490th BS received three B-25Gs equipped with the 75 mm cannon in the nose. The squadron soon put its new aircraft to work, going after locomotives on 15, 17 and 18 November and using the cannon and 500-lb bombs to destroy or damage several locomotives in marshalling yards. On a few missions the 490th BS also used the B-25Gs to attack anti-aircraft positions for the other flights bombing at medium altitudes. The cannon-armed Mitchells claimed six more locomotives damaged or destroyed in attacks on several marshalling yards in early December.

The Tenth Air Force assigned bird names to all of its aircraft as a form of code. B-25Cs were called 'Gulls' and B-25Ds were 'Crows' (although both models were often simply lumped together as 'Gulls'), while the newly arrived B-25Gs were 'Fishers'. When the B-25Hs arrived in 1944 they were christened 'Pigeons' and, finally, the B-25Js were 'Siskins' or sometimes 'Jays'.

The effort against locomotives and rolling stock would, however, take time to have an impact on the flow of supplies to Japanese forces in northern Burma. The more immediate task was to ensure that the key bridges on the railway system

In late 1943 the 490th BS received several B-25Gs fitted with a 75 mm cannon in the nose. The weapon proved effective against both large targets and locomotives, although it was difficult to get more than two shots off with the cannon during a strafing run. Here, a 490th BS B-25G flies wing on another squadron aircraft (*Author's collection*)

A 490th BS B-25 in a hardstand at the squadron's base at Kurmitola, India, in late 1943. The red surround to the national insignia appears to have been painted over with insignia blue following a revised directive issued in September 1943. Note the position for a 0.50-cal machine gun in the tail cone – some late-model B-25C/Ds had them installed in the tail (*Author's collection*)

remained unserviceable, but success still eluded the medium bombers. It had to date proven exceedingly difficult to knock out a bridge. Getting a direct hit on a target only 15 ft wide from medium altitude was challenging. Experience showed that even near misses would do little to damage a strongly built bridge structure. To compound the problem, IJA engineers proved to be capable of making rapid repairs to all but the most severe damage, including building bypass bridges alongside a damaged structure.

As an example, by the end of 1943 the B-25s and the 7th BG's B-24s had flown 39 missions against the Myitnge bridge, with the Liberators dropping 1219 bombs and recording 18 hits. This meant that only 1.5 per cent of all the bombs dropped actually struck their target. The medium bombers had a better average, getting one hit for every 15 sorties. The bombers tried 500-, 1000- and even 2000-lb bombs, without much difference in the end result. Attacks on the six major bridges in the Burma railway system accounted for 17 per cent of all the bombs the USAAF dropped on the country in 1943, with precious little to show for this effort. Only a direct hit could damage a bridge sufficiently to render it unserviceable, and the statistical chances of achieving this with the methods employed were almost nil.

With their companion squadrons earmarked for China, the men of the 490th BS realised that responsibility for continuing the bridge-busting campaign in Burma rested with them. Squadron CO Lt Col Robert McCarten determined that the unit would find a solution to the problem. In the final months of 1943 the 490th tried to develop tactics that would work. Having bombed unsuccessfully from medium altitudes, the unit switched to low-level attacks using the techniques of skip bombing developed in the Pacific, only to find that once released, the bombs would often bounce over a bridge or go under to explode beyond, doing no damage whatsoever. An attempt at dive-bombing only proved that the B-25 was not designed for this type of attack.

The 9th PRS obtained several war-weary B-25Cs from the 341st BG to supplement its F-4 and F-5 Lightning photo-reconnaissance aircraft. The 9th stripped the B-25s of virtually all their armament, leaving one 0.50-cal machine gun in the nose and a stinger in the tail, and cut camera ports in the side of the fuselage. The unit then used the aircraft for terrain mapping in northern Burma. This B-25C was later transferred to the 20th TRS (*Peter M Bowers Collection, Museum of Flight*)

Ironically, the solution came about purely by accident on 1 January 1944. That day, squadron operations officer Capt Robert Erdin was assigned to bomb the Mu River bridge – one of the six critical bridges in Burma's railway system. He decided to try a new approach to the target. On most attacks, the B-25s flew at a diagonal or at right angles to the bridge before dropping their bombs. Erdin chose to follow the line directly to the bridge before dropping his bombs. Coming in at low level, he was suddenly forced to pull up just before dropping his bombs to avoid a tall dead tree immediately in front of him. Hurriedly pushing his B-25 back down again, Erdin hit the bomb release button, fully expecting to see his bombs bounce off the bridge. He and his crew were astonished when two of the bridge's spans fell into the river. When his bombs were released in a slight dive, they fell at an angle that enabled them to hit the bridge and explode instantly, instead of bouncing off. This technique proved to be the answer. With some refinements and further training, in the months to come the 490th BS would establish an astonishing record of destruction.

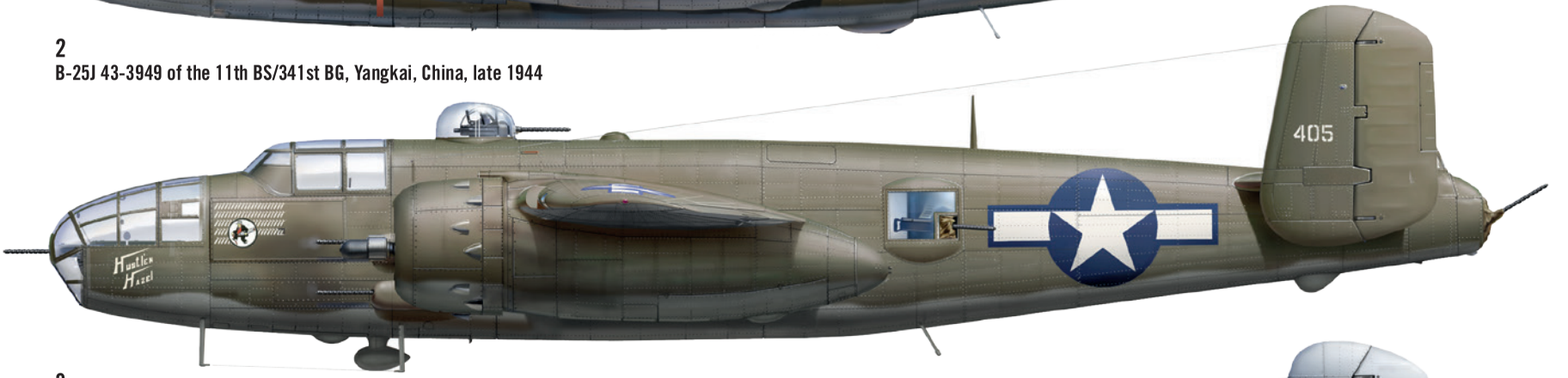
The 9th Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron (PRS) also operated a small number of 'hand-me-down' B-25s in support of Chinese forces in northern Burma. In May 1943 the unit initially obtained several older Mitchells from the 341st BG and supplemented these during the year with more B-25s as they were retired from combat. These aircraft had most of their guns removed, leaving only a single 0.30- or 0.50-cal machine gun in the nose and a single weapon firing out of the tail that the pilot could operate by pulling on a rope! With added fuel tanks and camera ports on either side of the rear fuselage, these jury-rigged photo-reconnaissance B-25s carried out regular unescorted flights into Burma to photograph targets and terrain features. One of these aircraft, named *Shutterbug*, had already flown 70 combat missions with the 341st BG, making three belly landings during its combat service, prior to completing a further 78 missions with the 9th PRS. The unit later used its B-25s to run a courier service delivering photographs to units across India.

In May 1944, the 9th PRS transferred a C- and a D-model to the 20th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron, operating in northern Burma. The 20th apparently used these aircraft for some months on reconnaissance missions, undertaking high-altitude surveys of the terrain in northern Burma for Stilwell's forces.

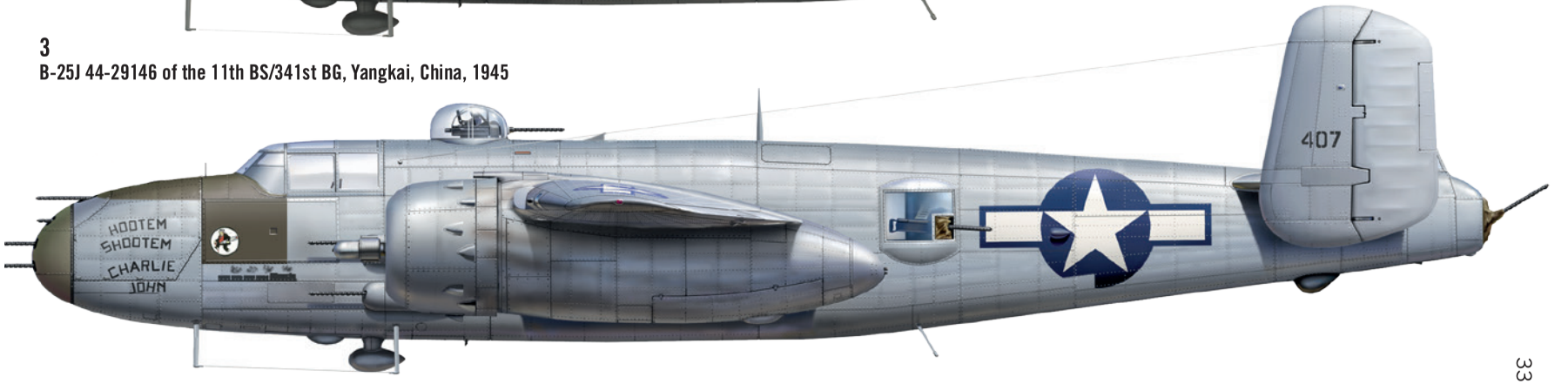
COLOUR PLATES

1
B-25C (serial unknown) of the 11th BS/341st BG, Kunming, China, circa February 1943

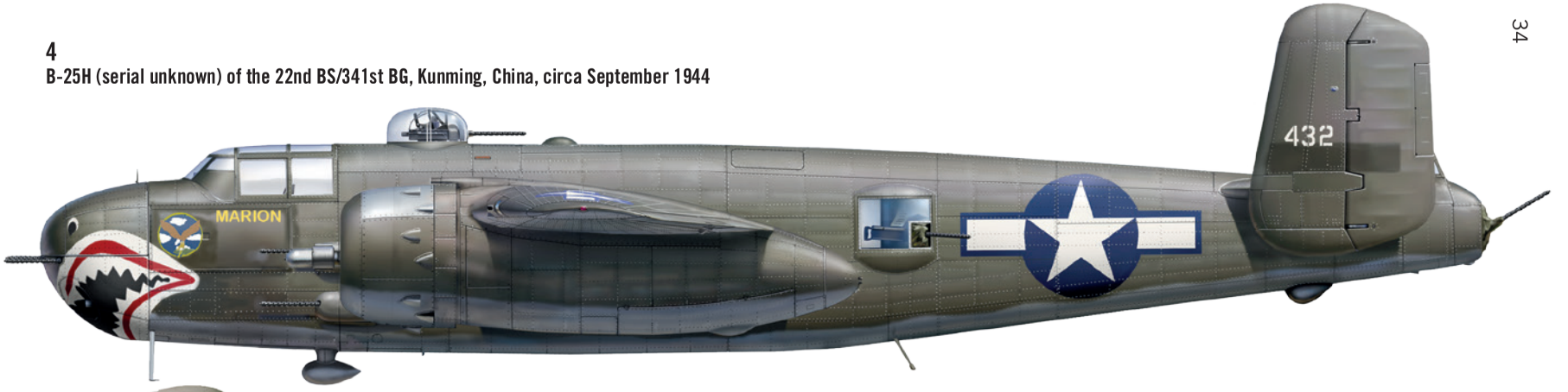
2
B-25J 43-3949 of the 11th BS/341st BG, Yangkai, China, late 1944



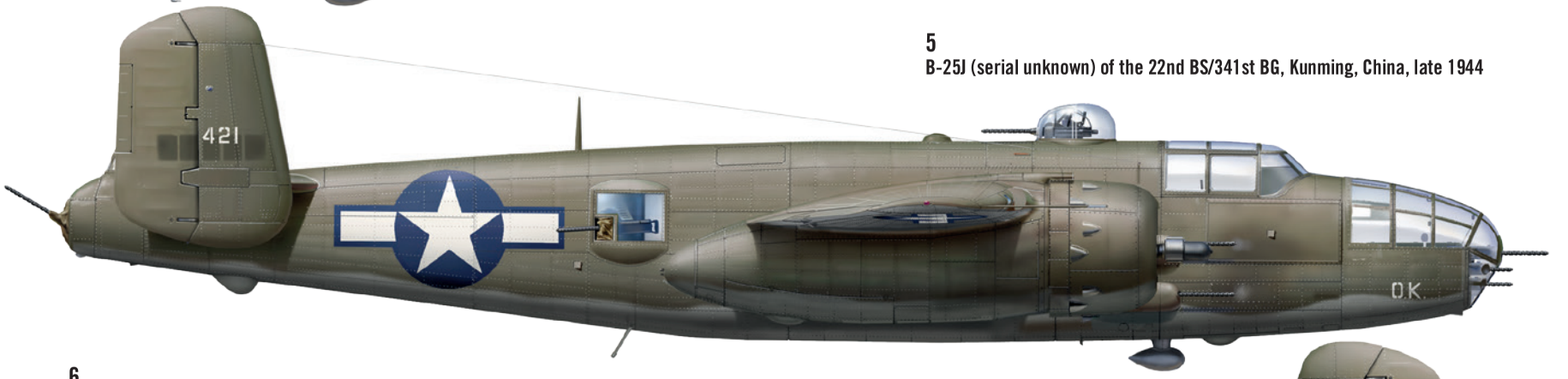
3
B-25J 44-29146 of the 11th BS/341st BG, Yangkai, China, 1945



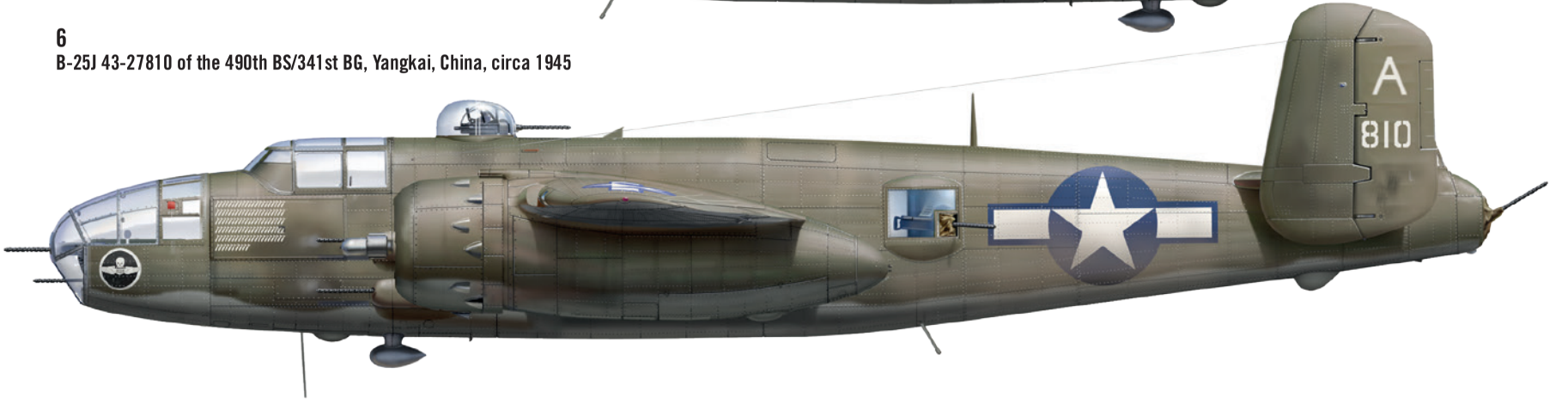
4
B-25H (serial unknown) of the 22nd BS/341st BG, Kunming, China, circa September 1944



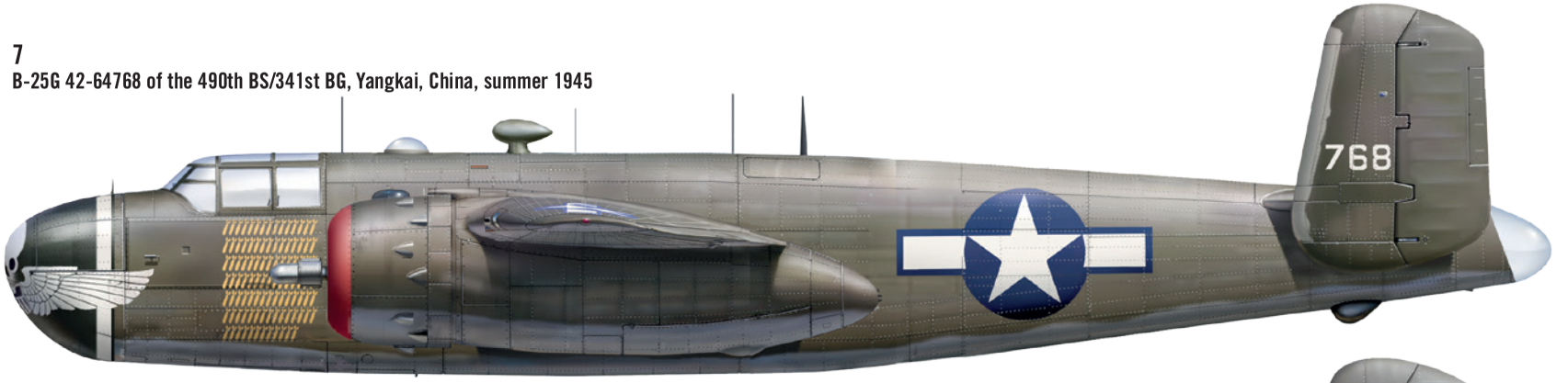
5
B-25J (serial unknown) of the 22nd BS/341st BG, Kunming, China, late 1944



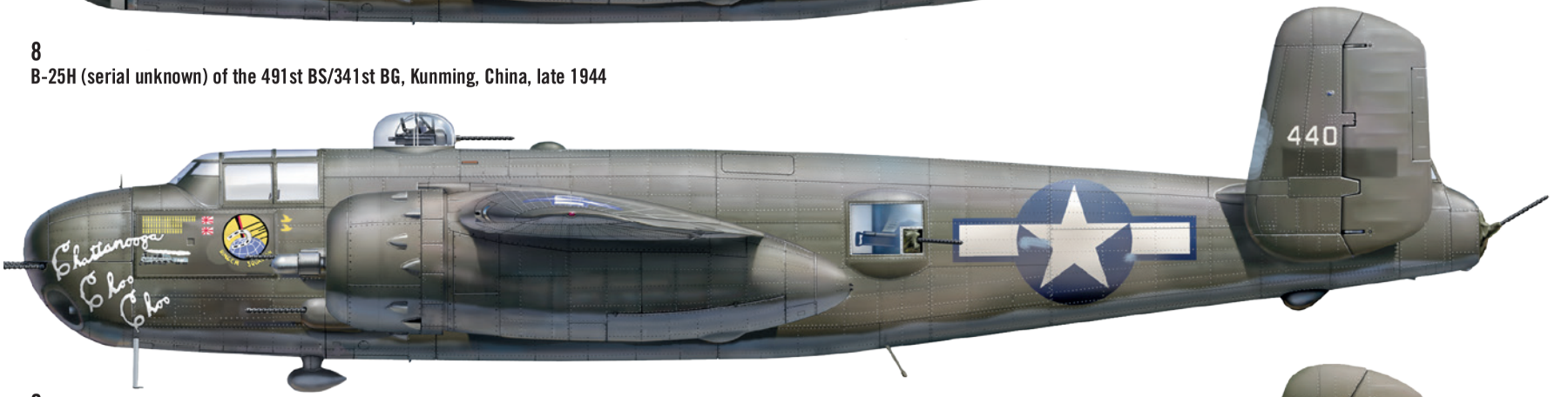
6
B-25J 43-27810 of the 490th BS/341st BG, Yangkai, China, circa 1945



7
B-25G 42-64768 of the 490th BS/341st BG, Yangkai, China, summer 1945



8
B-25H (serial unknown) of the 491st BS/341st BG, Kunming, China, late 1944



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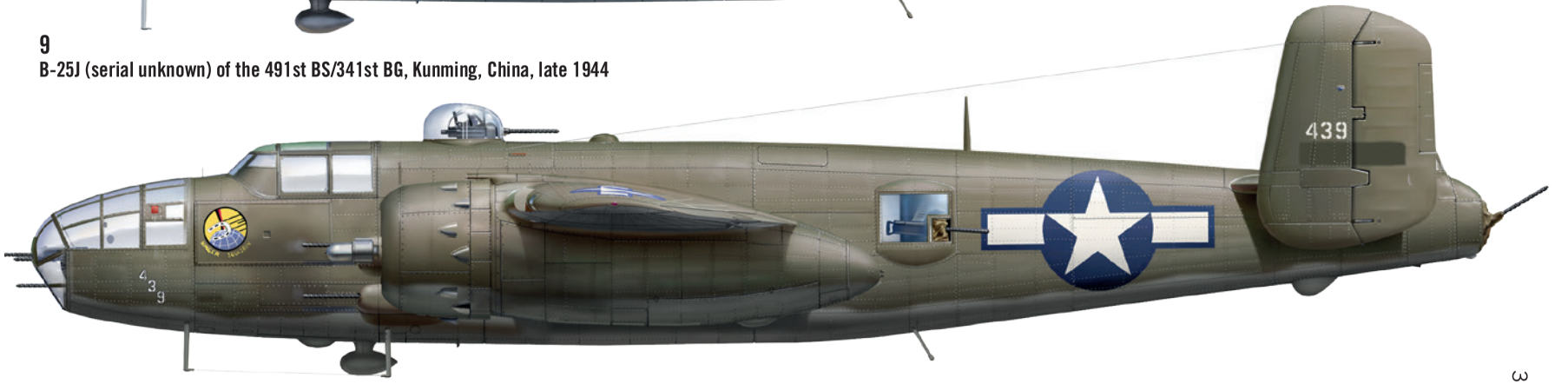
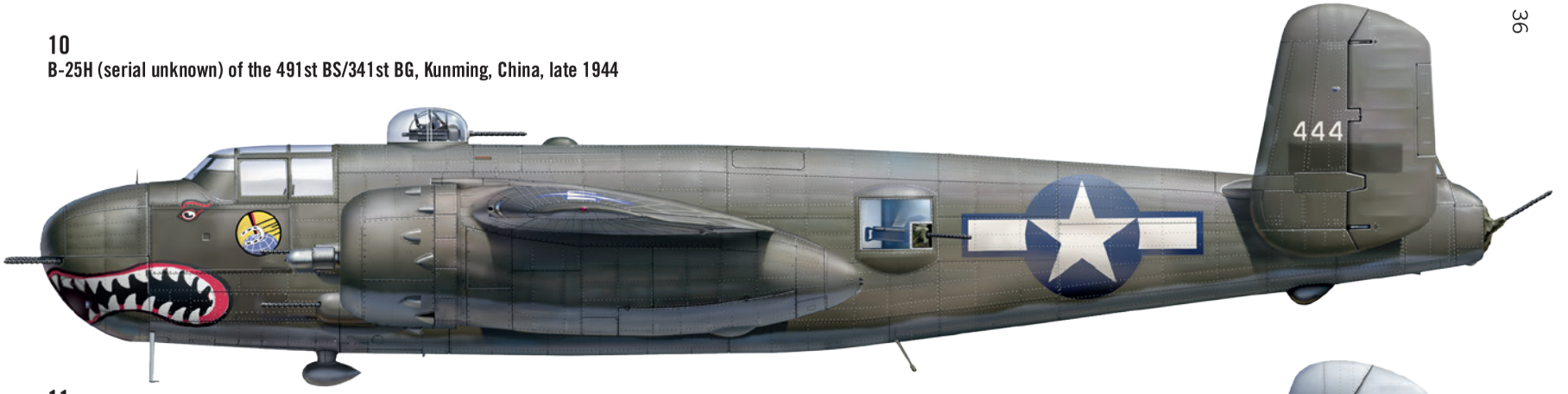
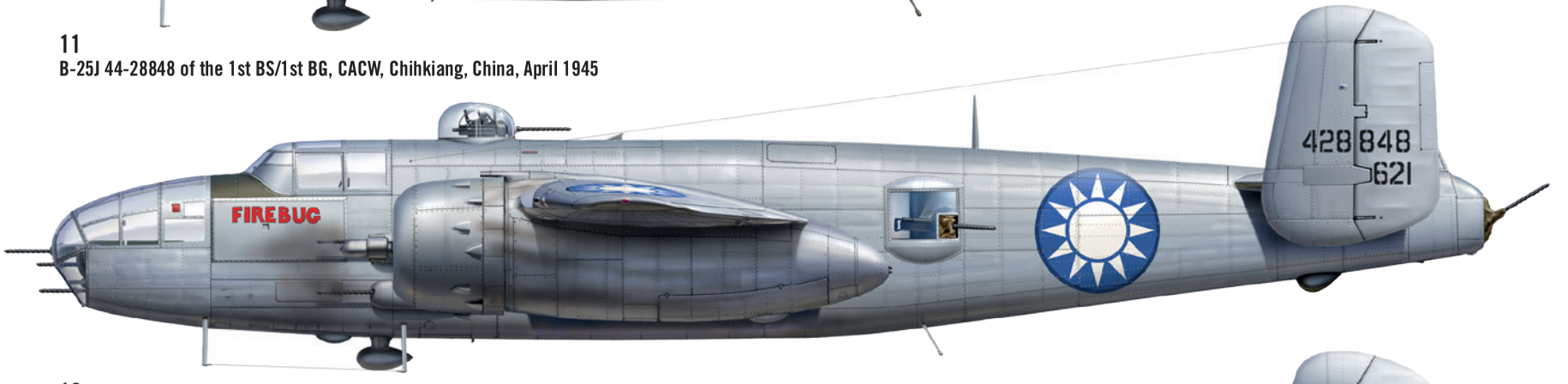
B-25J (serial unknown) of the 491st BS/341st BG, Kunming, China, late 1944



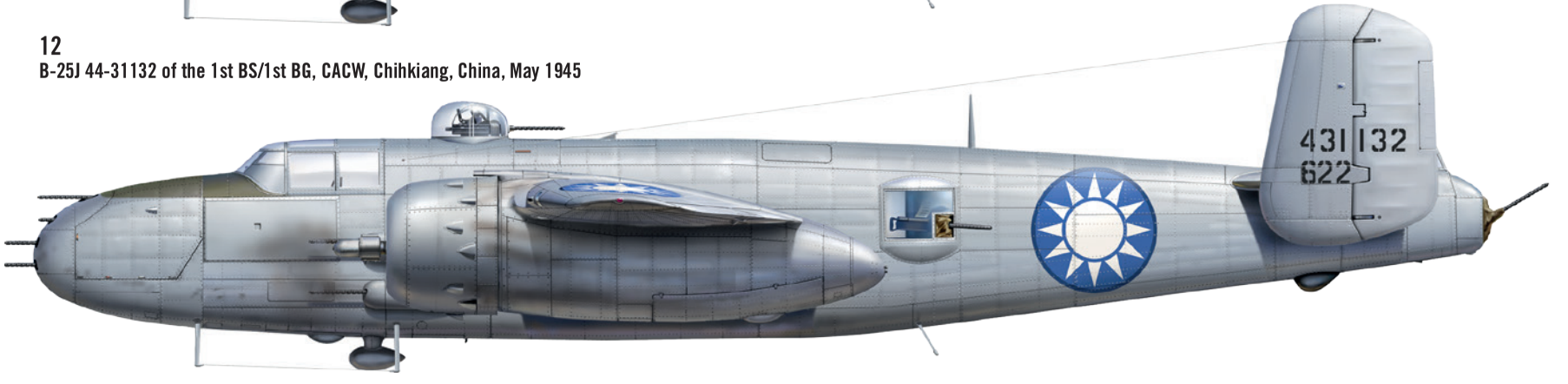
10
B-25H (serial unknown) of the 491st BS/341st BG, Kunming, China, late 1944



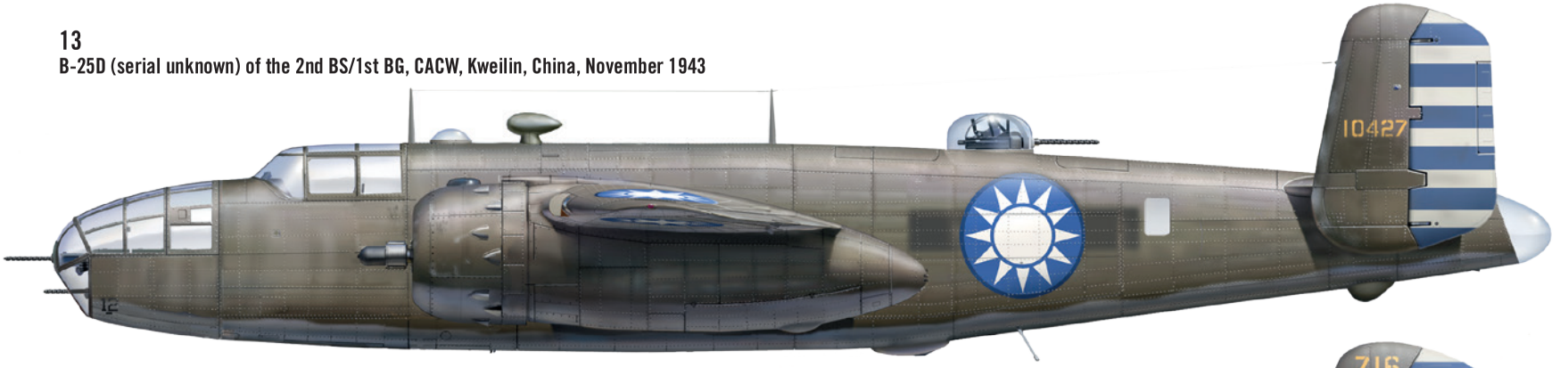
11
B-25J 44-28848 of the 1st BS/1st BG, CACW, Chihkiang, China, April 1945



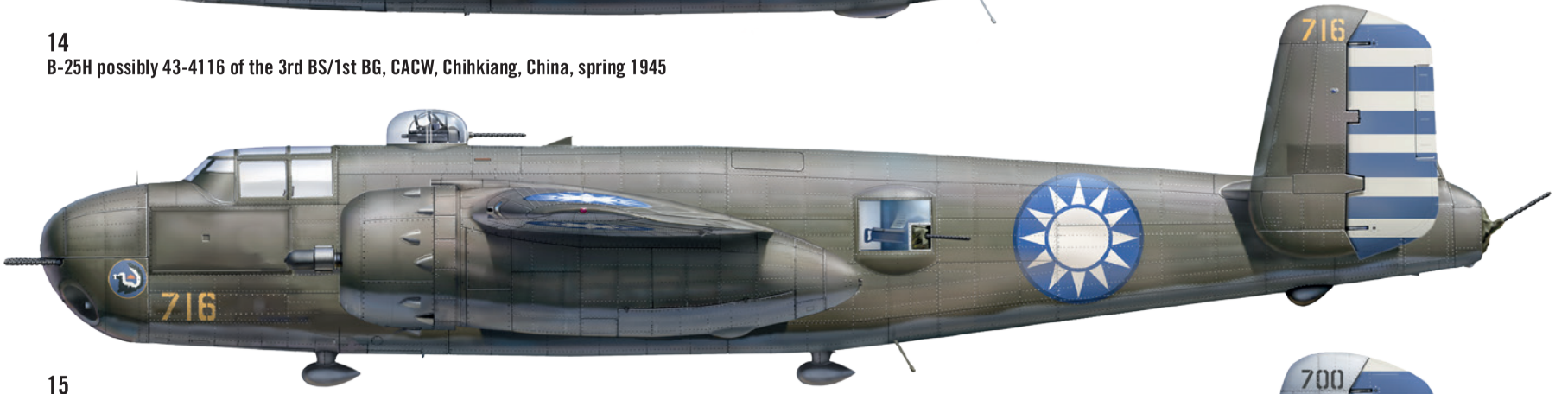
12
B-25J 44-31132 of the 1st BS/1st BG, CACW, Chihkiang, China, May 1945



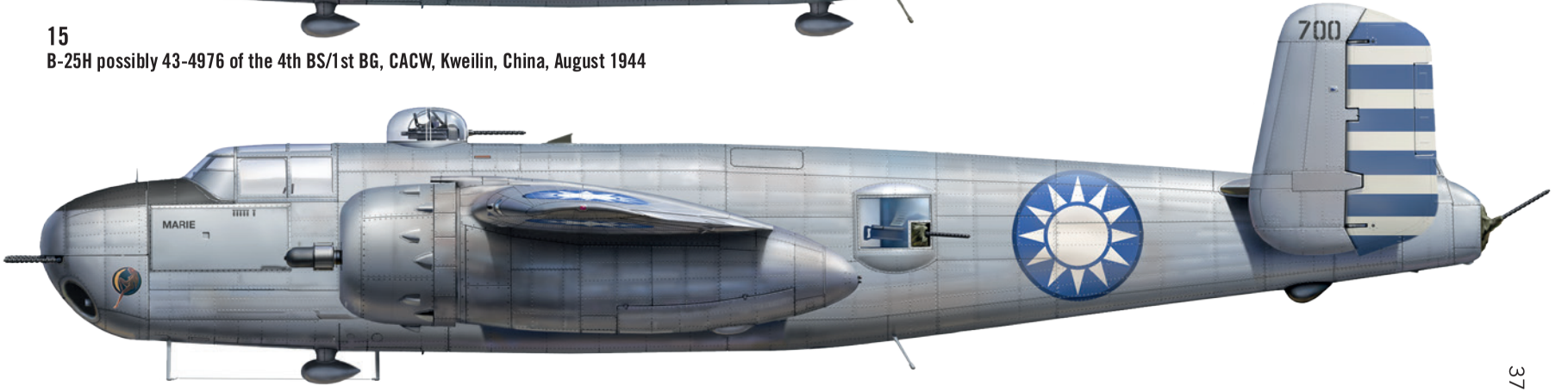
13
B-25D (serial unknown) of the 2nd BS/1st BG, CACW, Kweilin, China, November 1943



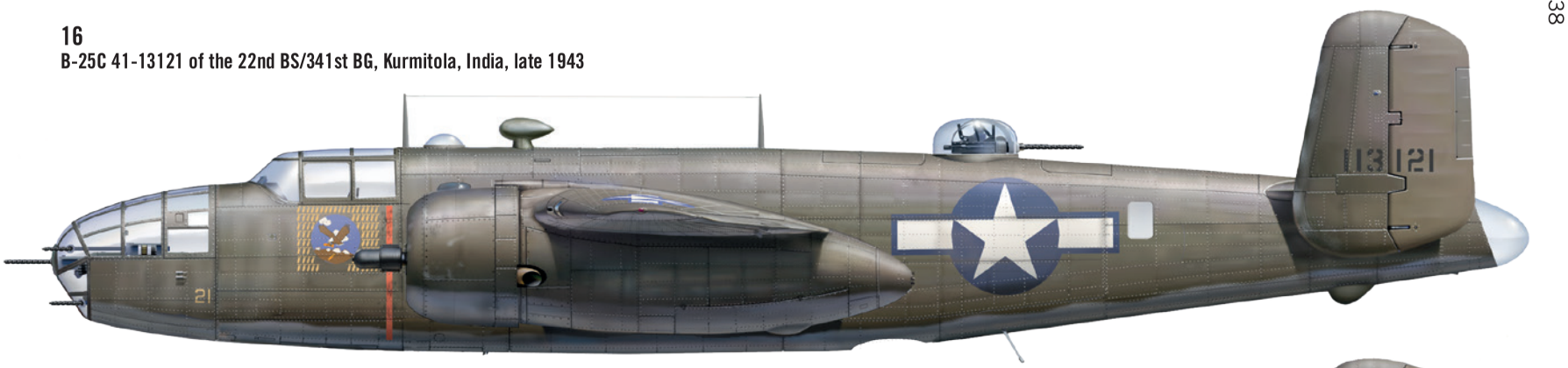
14
B-25H possibly 43-4116 of the 3rd BS/1st BG, CACW, Chihkiang, China, spring 1945



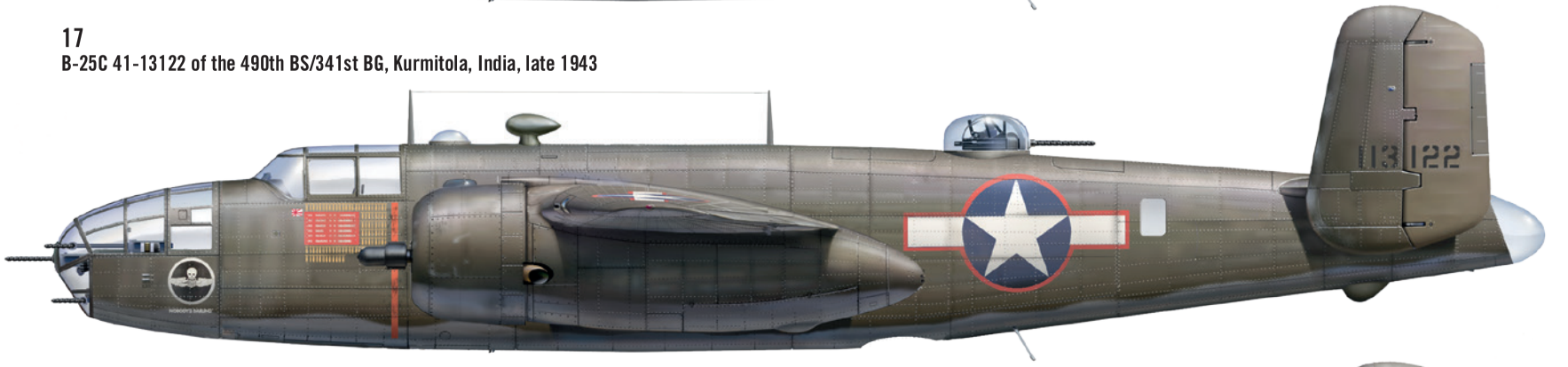
15
B-25H possibly 43-4976 of the 4th BS/1st BG, CACW, Kweilin, China, August 1944



16
B-25C 41-13121 of the 22nd BS/341st BG, Kurmitola, India, late 1943



17
B-25C 41-13122 of the 490th BS/341st BG, Kurmitola, India, late 1943



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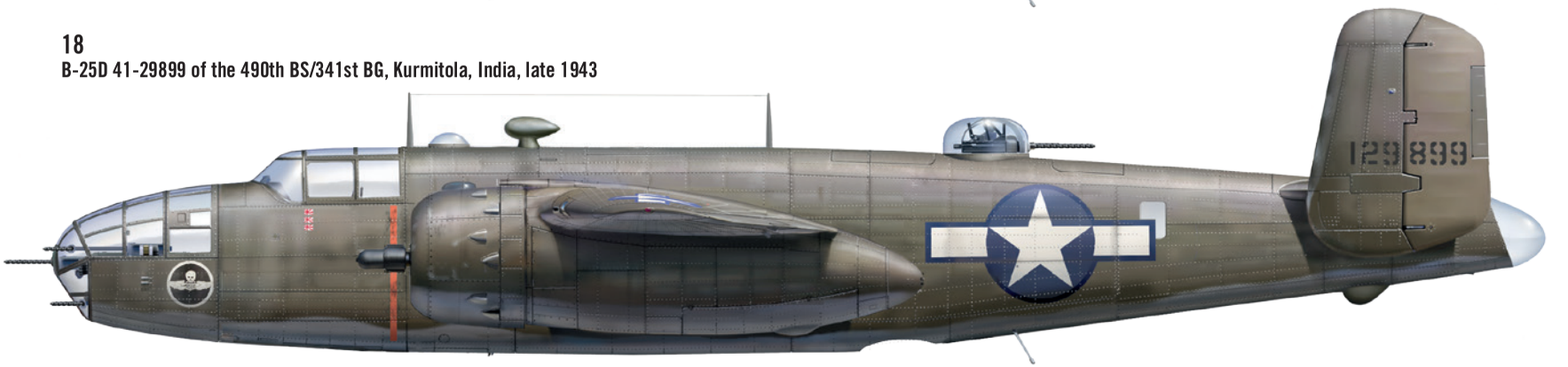
B-25D 41-29899 of the 490th BS/341st BG, Kurmitola, India, late 1943



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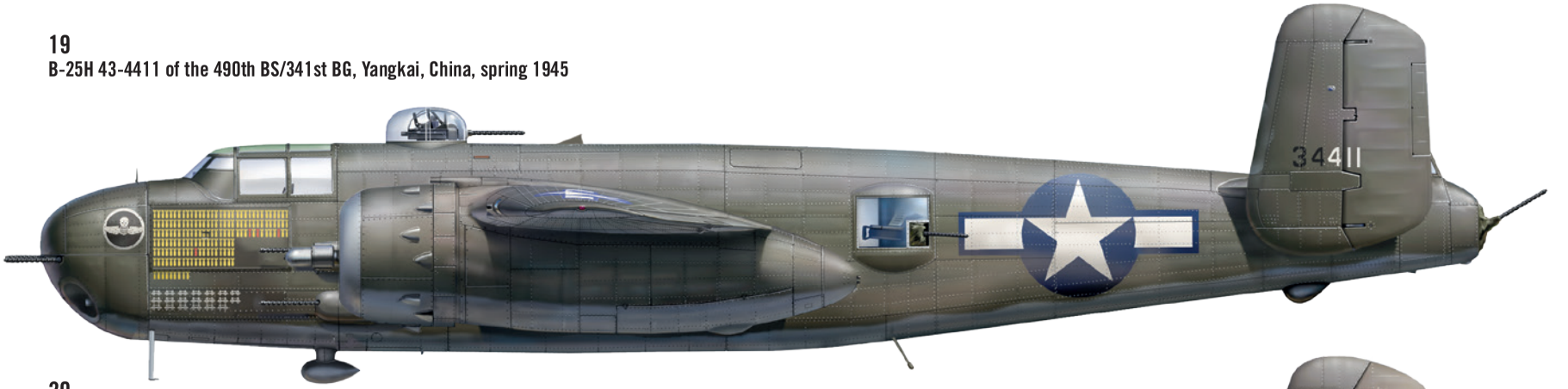
B-25H 43-4411 of the 490th BS/341st BG, Yangkai, China, spring 1945



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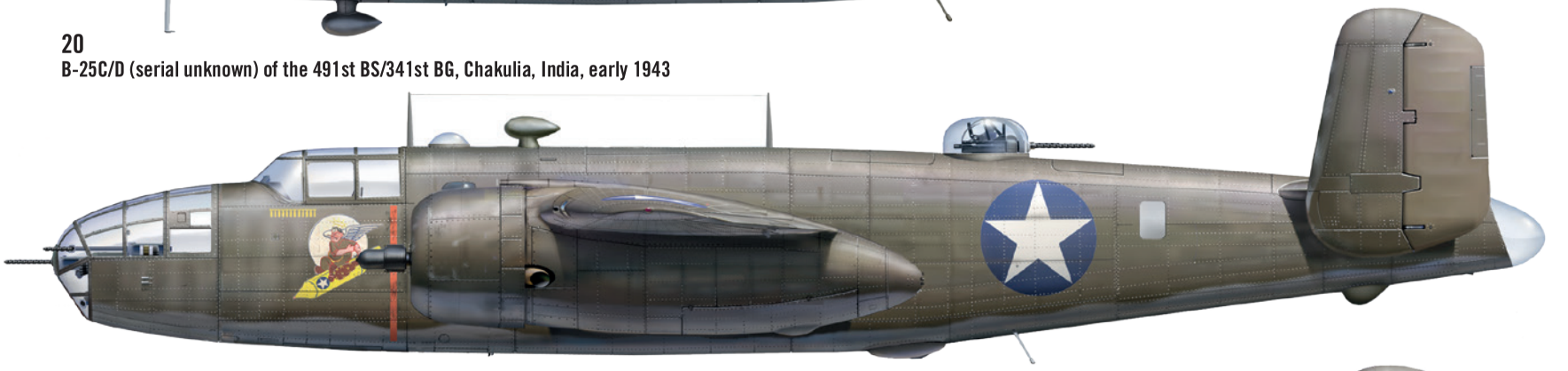
B-25C/D (serial unknown) of the 491st BS/341st BG, Chakulia, India, early 1943



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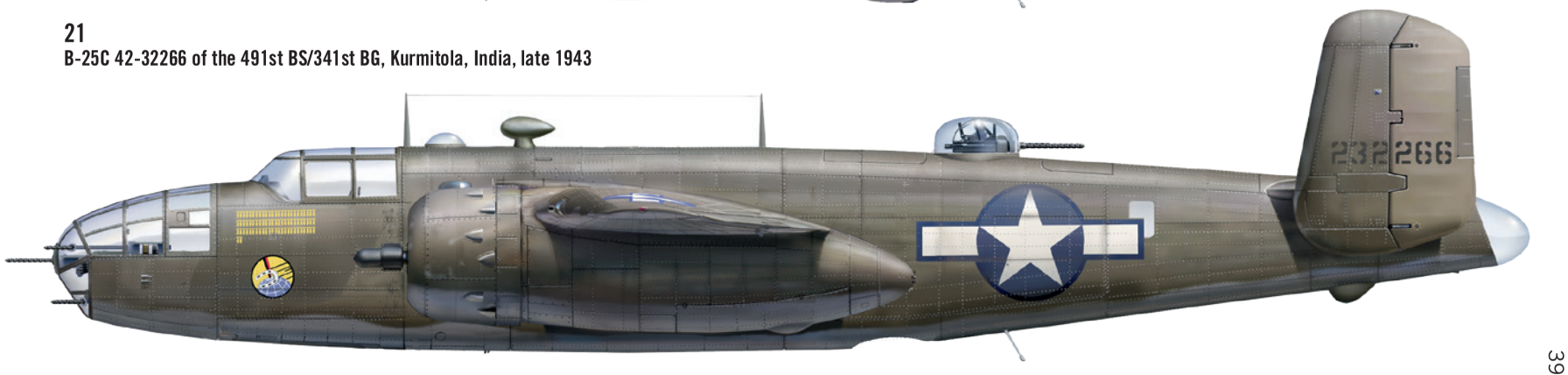
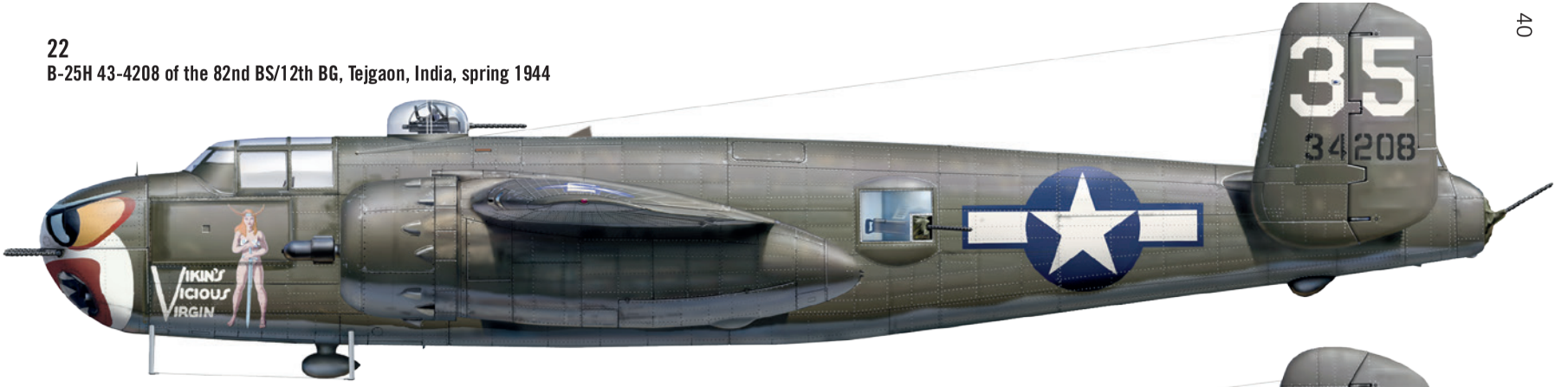
B-25C 42-32266 of the 491st BS/341st BG, Kurmitola, India, late 1943



22
B-25H 43-4208 of the 82nd BS/12th BG, Tejgaon, India, spring 1944



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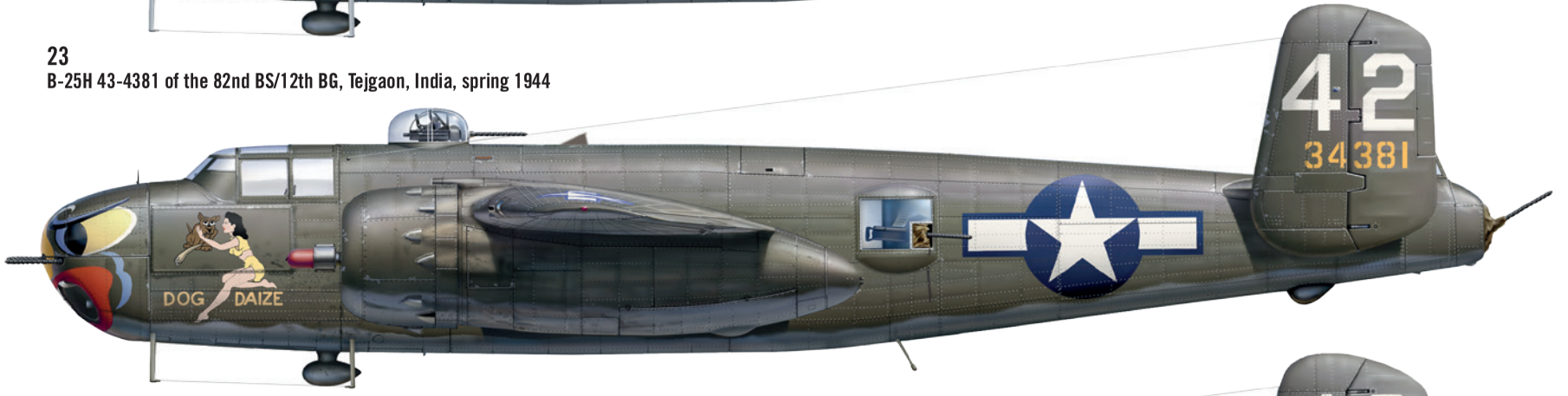
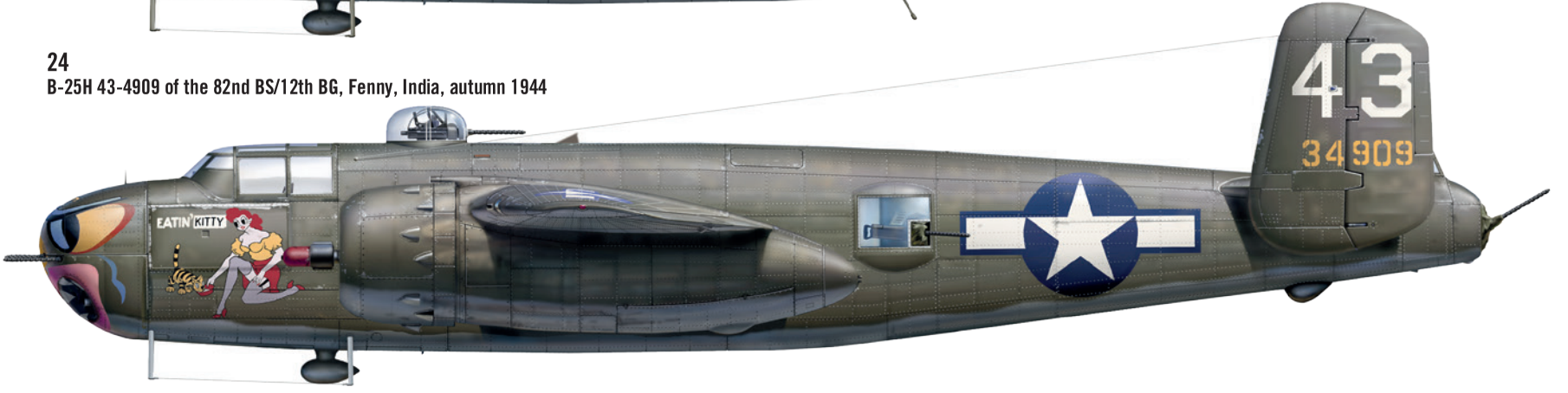
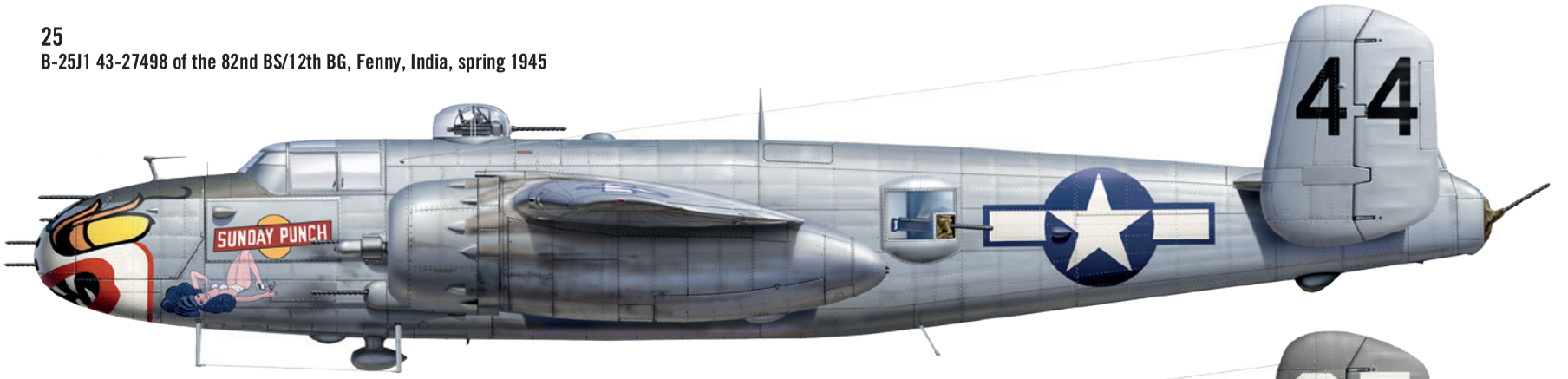
B-25H 43-4381 of the 82nd BS/12th BG, Tejgaon, India, spring 1944



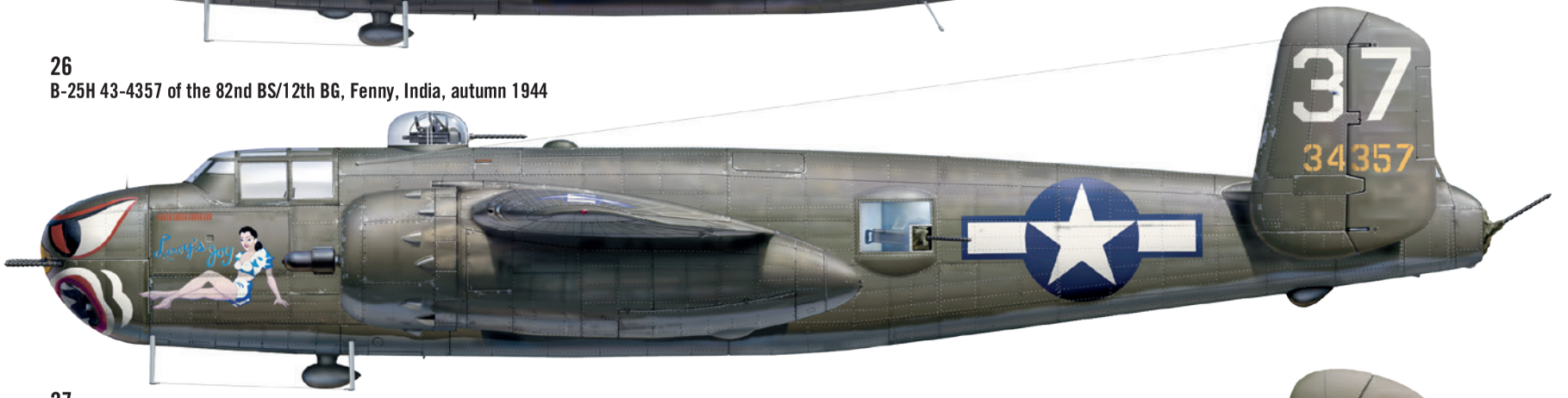
24
B-25H 43-4909 of the 82nd BS/12th BG, Fenny, India, autumn 1944



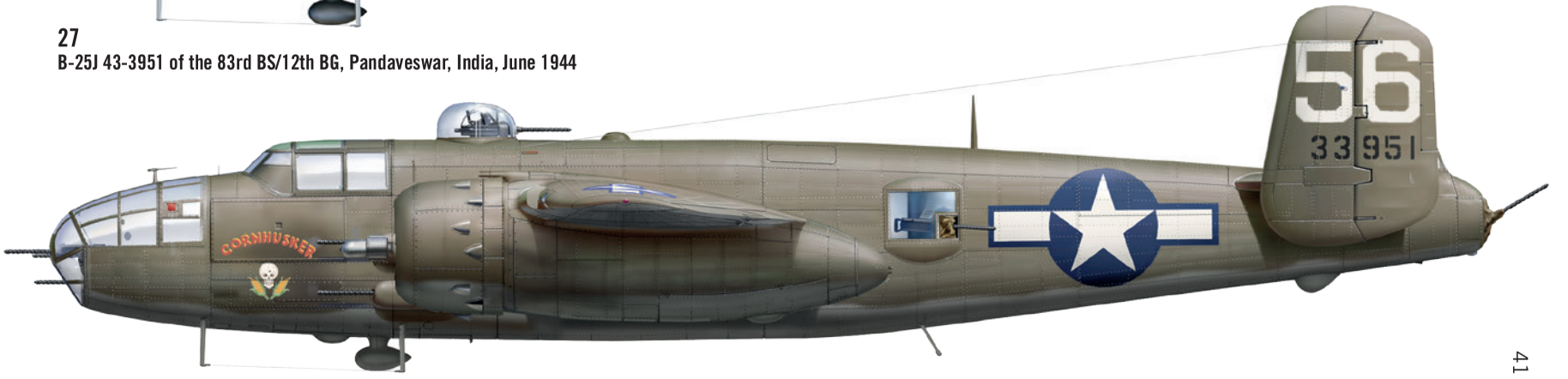
25
B-25J1 43-27498 of the 82nd BS/12th BG, Fenny, India, spring 1945



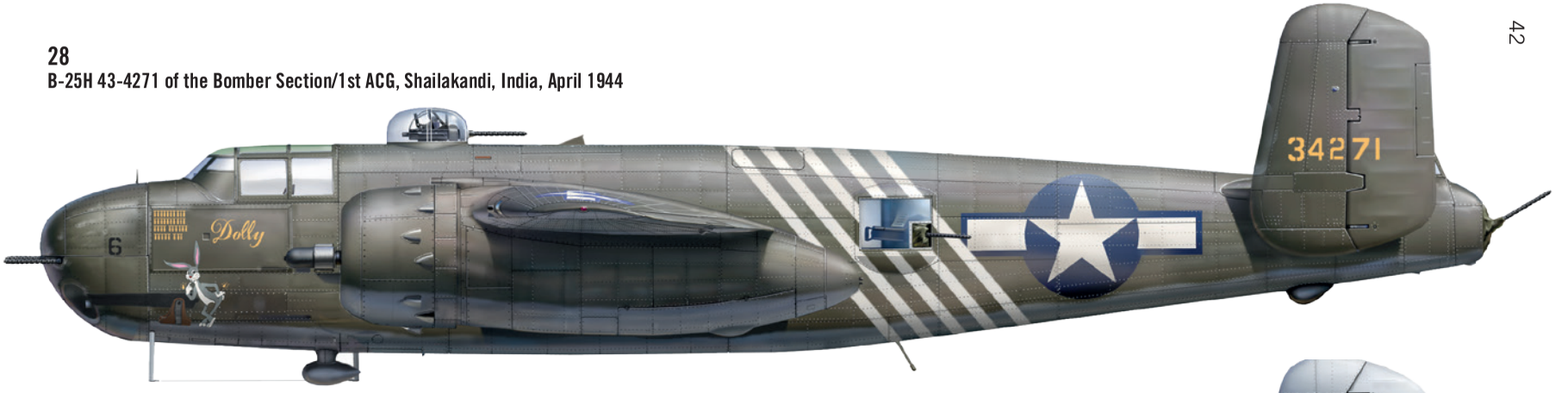
26
B-25H 43-4357 of the 82nd BS/12th BG, Fenny, India, autumn 1944



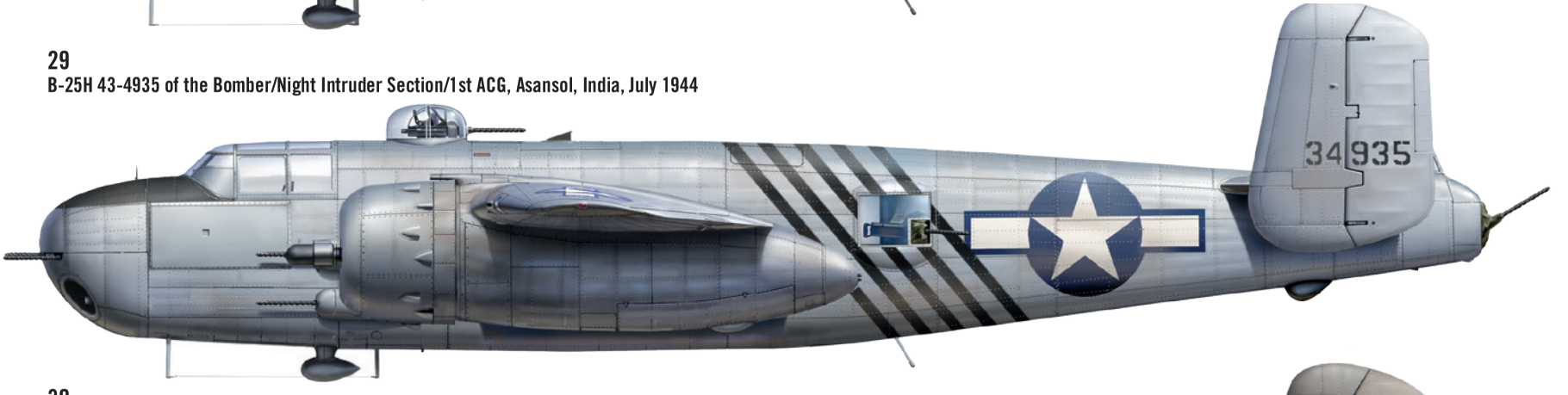
27
B-25J 43-3951 of the 83rd BS/12th BG, Pandaveswar, India, June 1944



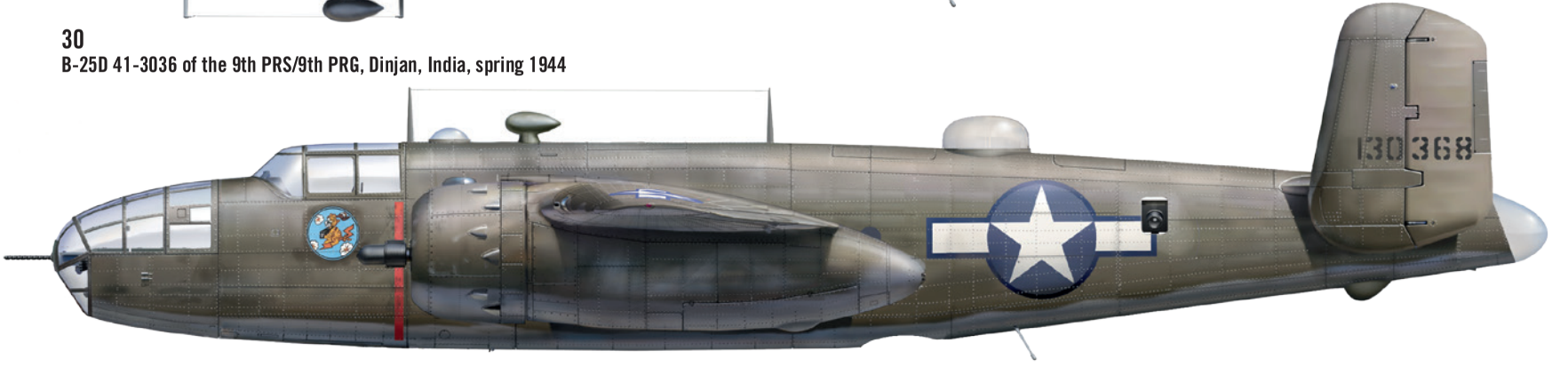
28
B-25H 43-4271 of the Bomber Section/1st ACG, Shailakandi, India, April 1944



29
B-25H 43-4935 of the Bomber/Night Intruder Section/1st ACG, Asansol, India, July 1944



30
B-25D 41-3036 of the 9th PRS/9th PRG, Dinjan, India, spring 1944



When the 491st and the 22nd BSs arrived in China they painted out the serial numbers on their aircraft and applied three-figure aircraft numbers instead. Aircraft 448 joined the 491st BS in the first half of 1944. The bomber wore the 491st BS's horseshoe insignia and its aircraft number on the left side of the fuselage (*Courtesy Tony Strotman*)

CHAPTER TWO

ALLIED PLANS AND JAPANESE OFFENSIVES

By the beginning of 1944, the Allies had, after prolonged and at times acrimonious debate, decided on an offensive plan for Burma for the coming year. Stilwell and his three American-trained Chinese divisions were to continue their effort to drive the Japanese out of northern Burma, thus linking Assam with the old Burma Road to China. Stilwell hoped to persuade Chiang Kai-shek to agree to allow the Chinese armies on the Salween River front, known as Y-Force, to cross the Salween and push westward toward his Chinese force in what was designated the Northern Combat Area Command (NCAC).

The British Fourteenth Army would order one of its Corps in the central front to advance to the Chindwin River, with a second Corps in the Arakan, on the coast, advancing toward Akyab. Maj Gen Orde Wingate had received approval for a greatly expanded long-range penetration mission to insert a division-sized force behind Japanese lines to disrupt IJA troops and supplies moving north to oppose Stilwell's advance. The newly formed Eastern Air Command would provide tactical air support for the Fourteenth Army and Stilwell's forces, while the Fourteenth Air Force would support any advance by Y-Force.

Although assigned to the Strategic Air Force, the medium bombers of the 490th BS, and the USAAF medium bomber group that would be transferred in from the Mediterranean, would continue to concentrate on interdicting the Japanese lines of communication in Burma.

In China, there were no firm plans for a ground offensive in 1944 using the Chinese armies. The main effort against Japanese forces in-theatre would instead continue to be Chennault's air campaign. During 1944 Chennault wanted to intensify his offensives against enemy merchant shipping and air power in China – the two priorities of the Fourteenth Air Force. His medium bomber squadrons, in particular, were building up an impressive total of Japanese merchant ships sunk or damaged. Chennault envisioned using medium bombers to cut off the flow of shipping down the Yangtze River, to disrupt port facilities along the Chinese coast, interdict Formosa as a base for Japanese shipping and air power and cut the shipping lanes in the South China Sea.

To achieve these objectives Chennault wanted two groups of medium bombers, in addition to more fighter groups and his single heavy bomber group, the latter being able to attack shipping beyond the range of the mediums. The critical variable was the ability of the 'Hump' route to deliver the supplies needed for his proposed air campaign, which seemed doubtful at the time. An additional complication was the advanced planning for Operation *Matterhorn*, which would see B-29 bombers based in China for raids against Japan. Supporting this ambitious campaign would likely mean diverting away some of the 'Hump' tonnage from the Fourteenth Air Force. Chennault did not consider a Japanese offensive against his air bases a serious risk, arguing that USAAF air support would enable Chinese armies to withstand the Japanese, whose extended supply lines supporting any ground offensive would be subjected to air attack.

The Japanese were not indifferent to the risks their armies faced in Burma and China and were developing their own plans to counter Allied air and ground offensives. The IJA's Burma Area Army had realised that the mountain ranges between Burma and India were not an impermeable barrier to an advance into Burma by the Allies. To forestall a possible advance by the Fourteenth Army, the IJA decided to launch a pre-emptive attack on the British base at Imphal to block the route into Burma. This was designated Operation *U-Go* and was scheduled to begin in March 1944.

To prevent the Fourteenth Army from moving forces from the Arakan to Imphal, the Japanese planned a second, preliminary attack a month before *U-Go*, christened Operation *Ha-Go*, in the Arakan to tie down the British and Indian Army divisions there. If the IJA could capture Imphal before the onset of the monsoon in May, the Japanese believed that it would be exceedingly difficult for the Fourteenth Army to launch a counter-offensive until fair weather returned months later.

U-Go was a gamble involving high risk. The IJA's 15th Army, charged with mounting the offensive, lacked adequate supplies, would be operating on an over-extended and precarious line of communications, and was without adequate air power to support an operation of this magnitude.

Japanese plans for an offensive in China were even more ambitious. As Stilwell had predicted, the success of Chennault's air offensive prompted a response from the enemy, and it was massive. The Imperial

After several weeks of practice, on 23 January 1944 Capt Robert Erdin, the 490th BS's operations officer, tried out his new low-level bombing technique against the Myittha River bridge using 1000-lb bombs. Two bombs completely demolished the bridge. This photograph shows the spans lying in the river below (*3A-37708, RG342H, NARA*)

General Headquarters in Tokyo saw clear advantages in having the China Expeditionary Army, commanding all IJA forces in China, capture the Fourteenth Air Force's airfields in eastern China in an effort to disrupt Chennault's offensive against Japanese merchant shipping off the coast and vessels plying the Yangtze River supplying its armies in the centre of the country. This would also prevent the USAAF B-29s from using these eastern China air bases for attacks on Japan.

The third Japanese objective was to establish a land line of communications stretching from northern China to French Indochina by completing the capture of the railway lines that ran along this route. This would, in theory, allow the IJA to supply its armies in China and Southeast Asia without depending on the merchant shipping that was coming under increasing attack from US Navy submarines as well as Chennault's aircraft.

The entire offensive, designated Operation *Ichi-Go*, consisted of two phases. In the first phase, Operation *Kogo*, Japanese forces would capture the railway line running from Hankow north to the Yellow River and on to Peking. *Kogo* would begin in April 1944 and take two months to complete. In the second phase, Operation *Togo*, the Japanese armies would advance south from Hankow to capture the railway line running to French Indochina and the eastern China airfields in three successive operations that were to be completed by the end of the year. *Ichi-Go* was the largest offensive the IJA ever mounted, involving more than half-a-million troops, 15,000 motor vehicles and tanks, 1500 artillery pieces and 200 aircraft.

BURMA OFFENSIVE FROM FEBRUARY TO JUNE 1944

The 22nd and 491st BSs flew their last missions from India during the first week of January 1944 and then began moving their air and ground echelons to China, settling in at their new base at Yangkai, west of Kunming, toward the end of the month. The 490th BS continued on its own until the arrival of a new medium bomber group in March 1944.

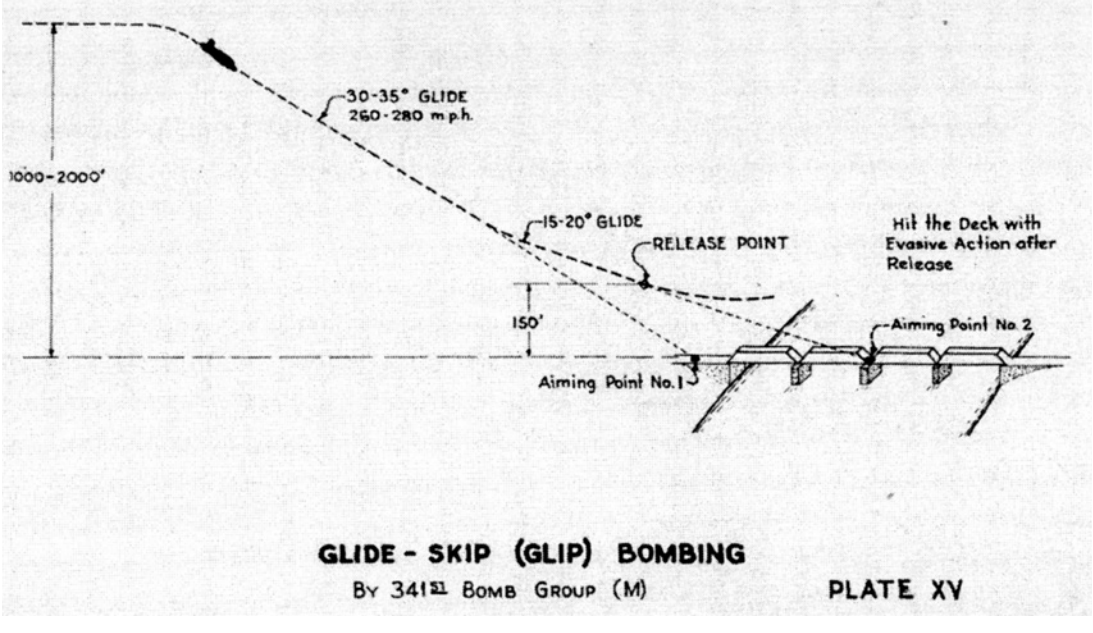
The squadron's first few missions of the month were continuing attacks on railway facilities, with mixed formations of B-25Cs, Ds and Gs undertaking these operations. Not having a bombardier, the B-25Gs

would drop on the lead aircraft in the flight – always a B-25C/D, which carried a bombardier operating a Norden bombsight. On several occasions the B-25Gs went down to strafe with their 75 mm weapons, blowing up oil storage tanks with combinations of cannon shells and skip bombing and blasting rolling stock.

Toward the end of the month the 490th went back to attacking bridges. On 20 January five aircraft targeted a bridge at low level, dropping 1000-lb bombs to no effect. Three days later Capt Erdin went out to try his new bombing method against the Myittha River bridge after several weeks of practice. The first bomber's ordnance skipped over the bridge, the second B-25 knocked a span out of line and the third aeroplane's two 1000-lb bombs demolished the target. At the end of the month Erdin led two missions to bomb the Meza River bridge, which was one of the targets that had eluded the squadron for months. In successive runs on the bridge on 29 and 30 January, the bombers dropped the piers and spans, and went on to destroy a second bridge using the new bombing method. After their runs the B-25Gs continued on the deck to strafe locomotives and rolling stock. Erdin's method, which the squadron named 'Glip bombing' for its combination of glide and skip bombing, was not easy to execute and took practice. However, the 490th had now demonstrated its effectiveness over other methods of bridge bombing.

From January through to May 1944, when the monsoon rains arrived, the 490th BS continued to attack bridges with increasing success. At the end of January, the unit received new, more heavily armed B-25Hs (J-models would reach the squadron in April). They made their combat debut on 18 February, with the aircraft soon participating in bridge-bombing missions and the strafing of locomotives and rolling stock. During February the 490th BS destroyed seven bridges and left three more unserviceable. March was a slow month with only two bridges destroyed,

This illustration, from a Fourteenth Air Force instruction booklet on techniques for bombing bridges, shows the method of 'Glip bombing' that Erdin discovered by accident. The other squadrons in the 341st BG adopted the method with great success, although the technique required accurate flying and much practice to get results (*'Air Attack on Bridges', Headquarters Fourteenth Air Force, 31 March 1945, File 862.454-2, Air Force Historical Research Agency (AFHRA)*)



but in April the unit set a record by destroying 14 bridges and rendering eight unserviceable.

The most important mission flown that month was the destruction of the Sittang bridge in a night attack on the 8th. The Sittang crossing was the only railway bridge spanning the Sittang River, and it connected the railway system in Burma with the recently completed line from Bangkok and the route south to Singapore. After American bombing closed Rangoon as a port for Japanese merchant shipping, the railway lines from Thailand and south from Singapore became critical for moving supplies into Burma. Rendering the Sittang bridge unserviceable, even for a short period, would disrupt the IJA's logistical system.

By this time the pilots were well-practiced in the techniques involved in 'Glip bombing', but had limited experience using the method at night. Given the distance of the Sittang bridge from its base in India (a round trip of 1200 miles), the 490th apparently decided that a night mission would entail less risk of interception by fighters, despite the challenges of night bombing. The first attempt to bomb the bridge, on 6 March, was unsuccessful. The chosen date for the second attempt would have a near full moon to illuminate the target. In the evening, five B-25s took off from the RAF base at Chittagong for the long flight to the bridge. Several miles from the target they picked up the railway line that led directly to the bridge, the tracks glistening in the moonlight.

1Lt William Cook's B-25G was the second aircraft to attack, coming in at 300 ft. Cook dropped a pair of 1000-lb bombs that knocked out two spans of the bridge. He then banked sharply to the left to avoid ground fire coming up at his aeroplane, only to find himself heading directly for a large

A 490th BS B-25 pulling up after making a low-level 'Glip bombing' attack on the Mu River bridge in March 1944. On this run the 1000-lb bomb has just missed the centre of the bridge and has fallen alongside, in all likelihood doing no damage to the structure (*3A-37679, RG342H, NARA*)

At the end of 1944 Maj Gen Howard Davidson, Tenth Air Force commander, awards the Air Medal and the Distinguished Flying Cross to Robert Erdin, now a lieutenant colonel and CO of the 490th BG. Erdin discovered the low-level 'Glip bombing' technique that proved to be a highly successful method of destroying bridges (*3A-34042, RG342H, NARA*)

Burmese temple on the eastern bank of the Sittang River. Instinctively, he banked his bomber to the right and pulled back on the control column to get above the temple. Despite Cook's evasive action, the Mitchell's left wing hit the top of the structure, tearing off four feet outboard of the engine. Remarkably, Cook maintained control of his aeroplane, and with full right rudder and aileron, he managed to get his damaged B-25 into a slow climb. Eventually levelling off at 10,000 ft, and with his aircraft listing to the left, Cook nursed the bomber back to Chittagong. He landed here at 125 mph – 15 mph above the B-25's normal landing speed, using full right aileron to keep the bomber as level as possible.

The other crews inflicted more damage on the bridge, knocking several spans out of line. One crew had to bail out on the return flight when they ran out of fuel, but they eventually made it back to base. Cook received the Silver Star for his superb airmanship, but was tragically killed on a combat mission only four days later.

The 490th BS went on to destroy ten more bridges during May, bringing the unit's total for the year to 39 destroyed and 17 rendered unserviceable in attacks on 88 targets – a vast improvement over the efforts of the medium and heavy bombers during 1943. Maj Gen Davidson sent a congratulatory message to the squadron, praising them as the 'Bridge Busters'. The nickname stuck, and the 490th began calling itself 'The Burma Bridge Busters' or, as some squadron members dubbed it, 'The Dental Squadron – Bridge work our specialty'. The other benefit of Erdin's 'Glip bombing' tactic was that it required far fewer aeroplanes and missions to destroy a bridge. Previously, the squadrons would have had to send

out nine to 12 aircraft on several missions in the hope of inflicting some damage on a bridge. Now, the 490th could sortie a flight of three B-25s with a high probability of destroying or damaging a bridge in one mission.

The Japanese offensives in Burma brought new missions and targets for the 490th. The IJA launched Operation *Ha-Go* in the Arakan on 4 February 1944, successfully cutting off and encircling two Fourteenth Army infantry divisions of XV Corps. Instead of retreating in disarray as British and Indian forces had done in the past, the 5th and 7th Indian Divisions formed defensive positions and, supplied entirely by air, held off the Japanese attacks. The IJA divisions, battered and short of supplies, retreated at the end of February.

In the initial phase of the battle, the Fourteenth Army called on the Strategic Air Force for support. The 490th BS sent seven B-25s out on 8 February to bomb a Japanese strong point with 100-lb demolition bombs and fragmentation clusters. The lead flight had an accidental bomb release, dropping two miles short of the target, but the following flight of three aircraft accurately delivered its ordnance. Just before the B-25s had arrived, RAF Vengeance dive-bombers successfully identified the target with a series of attacks. Nine bombers returned the next day to bomb a suspected Japanese headquarters.

Despite RAF Wellingtons being assigned the tactical bombing role shortly thereafter, nine B-25s returned to the Arakan on 21 February when they attempted to bomb the entrances to tunnels in the area. However, target identification from medium altitude proved difficult when flying over a wide expanse of jungles and hills, particularly as Japanese troops were experts at using camouflage.

A 100-lb spike bomb. After watching ordnance bouncing off railway tracks at low altitude, the Tenth Air Force came up with the spike bomb. The spike was a steel extension made from broken truck axles that could be screwed into the nose of a regular demolition bomb. The spike would impale the bomb on the tracks long enough for the weapon to explode and wreck a section of the line (*3A-33926, RG342H, NARA*)

Operation *U-Go* began in early March, with three IJA divisions aiming to destroy the Fourteenth Army's IV Corps on the Imphal plain. Instead, IV Corps' divisions withdrew into the hills surrounding the plain, and although encircled, they held off the Japanese thanks to constant resupply from the air. Having launched their offensive with only a few weeks' worth of supplies in the expectation of rapidly capturing Imphal, the IJA divisions quickly became reliant on an over-extended supply system with limited capacity. This made it even more imperative that Allied aircraft disrupt these lines of supply to Japanese forces fighting at Imphal, destroying materiel before it could reach the frontline. While continuing their campaign against bridges, the pilots of the 490th BS began flying more missions in support of the Fourteenth Army, bombing IJA supply depots and troop concentrations close to the front.

The unit also began combining low-level rail and road sweeps with its attacks on bridges, using the 75 mm cannon in B-25G/Hs to rip up sections of track and destroy locomotives and rolling stock. Aircraft also dropped pronged spikes along the roads to puncture truck tyres. The 75 mm cannon had the disadvantage of being able to fire only two or three shells on a single strafing run, but a single hit on a locomotive's boiler would inflict severe damage. The B-25s began carrying 'spike' bombs as well, these weapons also destroying sections of track. The pilots had found that regular bombs would often bounce off the tracks to explode harmlessly in the fields alongside. By fitting a long, pointed steel spike onto the nose of a bomb, the weapon would impale itself onto the tracks and detonate.

Spike bombs falling onto a section of track in Burma. The bombs would blow up the track, immobilising locomotives and rolling stock along the line and in marshalling yards that would become targets for the medium bombers and USAAF and RAF fighter-bombers (*3A-37839, RG342H, NARA*)

The ideal tactic was to create these breaks over a long section of the line in order to strand locomotives and rolling stock, which could then be destroyed in subsequent attacks. Low-level attacks, however, ran a far greater risk of encountering ground fire. During February the 490th BS lost two aircraft on low-level missions and a further two in March, all apparently to ground fire.

During March the squadron flew 18 missions, completing its 200th mission in the CBI on the 18th of the month when 11 B-25s bombed an IJA storage area near the Chindwin River. April proved to be the unit's busiest month to date, with the 490th crews completing 29 missions targeting bridges and supply depots and doing their level best to disrupt the flow of supplies. The unit also tried a new tactic at this point in the campaign when its sent nine aircraft armed with 1000-lb bombs to target a road leading to Imphal in an attempt to cause a landslide that would render it impassable. The B-25s dropped 36 bombs in the target area, but poor visibility prevented crews from seeing the results of their attack. Following a request from the Fourteenth Army, the unit tried this tactic again in May when it flew two missions to block the same road, dropping strings of 500-lb bombs. This time the 490th did indeed block the road, although it was soon cleared by the IJA.

During the first half of May the unit carried out several more missions to bomb Japanese storage areas supporting the divisions fighting at Imphal, as well as attacking bridges leading to the frontline. By then the 490th's armourers had rigged up a mounting in the bomb-bays of the B-25s to allow an aircraft to carry four 1000-lb bombs to increase the damage inflicted on bridges, as well as the number that could be attacked on a single mission.

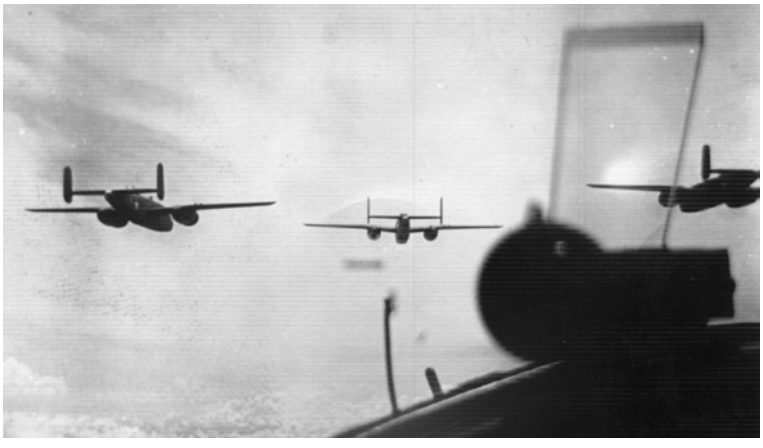
With the fighting in Burma showing no sign of abating, and the 490th finding it increasingly harder to maintain a heightened mission tempo, the operational burden on the unit was greatly relieved with the arrival of reinforcements in-theatre in the form of the 12th Bombardment Group (Medium) with four squadrons (81st, 82nd, 83rd and 434th Bombardment Squadrons (M)) of B-25s. Transferred in from the Twelfth Air Force in the Mediterranean in March 1944, the arrival of the 12th BG in India raised the number of B-25s assigned to the Strategic Air Force from 15 to 85. Once at Tejgaon airfield, in the Bengali city of Dhaka, the squadrons received new B-25H/J models in early April and, after a few weeks of transition training, began flying missions into Burma.

The 12th BG's squadrons added significant weight to the attacks on Japanese supply areas supporting the offensive against Imphal, with crews targeting railways and roads leading to the front and troop concentrations found on them. Because of its numerical strength, the group would often send two squadrons to attack the same target, doubling the striking power of the medium bomber force.

With the monsoon rains beginning to obscure targets, the B-25 squadrons took on a new mission when they joined RAF Wellingtons in transporting bombs and ammunition into Imphal for the British and Indian divisions fighting hard against the IJA and the locally-based RAF Hurricane fighter-bombers supporting them. There was a desperate

The 12th BG transferred to the Tenth Air Force in March 1944, picking up new B-25H/Js in India. With a mix of H- and J-models for medium altitude bombing missions, the 12th BG's squadrons, like other B-25 units in the CBI, adopted the practice of having the H-models fly wing on a B-25J, with the pilots of the former dropping their bombs when the bombardier in the J-model dropped his (*SQ-BOMB-81-HI, October 1944, AFHRA*)

shortage of USAAF and RAF transport aircraft in-theatre to sustain all the operations in Burma, where Allied troops and their supporting fighter-bombers were becoming increasingly reliant on air resupply to overcome the lack of an adequate road system. The commander of the Strategic Air Force agreed to the temporary diversion of the medium bomber squadrons to satisfy the urgent victualling needs of the Fourteenth Army at Imphal. While the 12th BG continued with the interdiction of IJA supply routes, on 20 May the 490th BS began flying ammunition into Imphal.



A formation of 490th BS B-25s flying during the monsoon. Note the gunsight mounted on the instrument panel for strafing. With the weather obscuring targets, the B-25s shifted to flying in ammunition for British and Indian troops fighting at Imphal. The Mitchells also brought in bombs for the RAF Hurricane fighter-bombers providing close air support to the troops (*Courtesy Tony Strotman*)

In the bad weather and mountainous terrain, the 490th BS lost two B-25s while performing this vital role – one on 26 May and a second two days later. The unit also had its first encounters with Japanese fighters for some weeks, Lt Col McCarten having a narrow escape when he ran into seven of them on his way to Imphal. The fighters pressed home their attacks, but McCarten managed to lose them, only to run into five more 15 minutes later. One fighter made a determined attack on McCarten's B-25, setting one of its engines on fire. McCarten again evaded the fighters, however, and flew back to Chittagong, where he made a successful crash-landing following the loss of his hydraulic system.

When the weather obscured their targets in Burma, the 12th BG's squadrons also flew ammunition in to Imphal. During the month of June, the 490th BS flew 635 sorties to Imphal, carrying in 1029 tons of ammunition. The crews were flying two to three sorties a day, which was a punishing schedule. Although some of the groundcrew relieved the weary aircrew, the pilots had to keep flying. The armourers again worked up a means of giving the B-25s more capacity, allowing them to carry 4000 lb of ammunition in their bomb-bays.

The other new Mitchell unit to enter operations at this time was the Bomber Section of the 1st Air Commando Group (ACG), formerly the 5318th Provisional Unit (Air), assigned to support Wingate's long-range penetration mission. Gen Arnold had promised to supply Wingate with his own air unit, consisting of light aircraft, glider, transport and medium bomber sections, with a fighter section for their protection, and appointed Cols Philip Cochran and John Allison as commander and deputy commander of the unit. When the RAF determined it could not provide medium bombers to the air unit, Cochran arranged the transfer of 12 B-25Hs to a newly created bomber section, and assigned some of his experienced fighter pilots to fly them. These aircraft arrived in early February, and the Bomber Section began flying combat missions on the 12th of the month.

Wingate's mission was designated Operation *Thursday*, and his British and Indian Army units were called Special Force. His plans called for two

brigades of infantry to be air lifted into central Burma along the railway line leading north to Myitkyina. Wingate's task was to disrupt the flow of supplies to the Japanese divisions opposing the advance of Stilwell's Chinese divisions in northern Burma. The Bomber and Fighter Sections were to serve as a form of flying artillery, providing close air support and interdiction to Special Force. For the rest of February, the Bomber Section flew missions in company with the P-51As of the Fighter Section into the area where Special Force troops would be operating, attacking rail and road traffic, river boats, airfields, bridges, storage areas and military facilities. One B-25 was lost on 4 March during a river sweep.

The ex-fighter pilots came to be enthusiastic about their new aircraft and its heavy armament. Many of the missions were flown at low level, where the results of an attack were immediately obvious. Most bombing missions were flown at an altitude of 1000–1200 ft, without bombsights, the pilots estimating the range on their own. They found the 75 mm cannon devastatingly effective against buildings, locomotives and rolling stock. One pilot later recounted his delight in blowing apart a large Japanese warehouse with his 75 mm cannon.

The airlift of Special Force, by glider and C-47 transports, began on the night of 5 March and was completed within six days. From then until 19 May the Air Commando B-25s and P-51s, with help from RAF Hurricane fighter-bombers and Vengeance dive-bombers, constantly provided close air support to Special Force. RAF controllers on the ground with the Special Force columns directed the bombers and the fighters to designated targets, enabling the bombers to change their approach to a target or bomb delivery as needed. On several missions an Air Commando L-5 light aircraft would mark the target with smoke grenades.

During April, the Air Commandos provided most of the air support to Special Force. By the time the unit was withdrawn on 19 May, the Bomber Section had completed 102 missions. Together with the fighters, the Bomber

The First Air Commando Force, later the 1st ACG, arrived in India to support Maj Gen Orde Wingate's mission behind Japanese lines in Burma. The hastily formed Bomber Section received 12 B-25Hs to augment the Force's offensive power. B-25H *Dolly*, shown here pulling away from a strike on a Japanese supply area at Wuntho, in central Burma, flew 38 combat missions prior to the Bomber Section completing operations in May 1944 (*3A-37823, RG342H, NARA*)

Section's B-25s had contributed to claims of 33 trucks, 54 goods wagons, four locomotives, 11 bridges and 268 buildings of various kinds destroyed.

In June 1944 the USAAF's India-Burma Sector prepared a report comparing the effectiveness of the B-25G/H with the bombardier-nosed B-25C/D and new B-25J in order to determine the appropriate ratio of H- to J-models for squadrons in-theatre. Experience flying the heavier cannon-armed B-25G/Hs on medium altitude missions demonstrated that they were less manoeuvrable than the bombardier-nosed versions, and some 15 mph slower, while the weight of the cannon reduced the bomb load for longer ranges. This presented difficulties when flying formation during medium altitude bombing missions, when the cannon-armed B-25s would fly wing on a bombardier-nosed lead Mitchell, dropping their bombs when the lead ship released its bombs. The B-25H was more economical as it carried only one pilot, although this increased the risk if he was incapacitated. Another disadvantage of the H-model was the difficulty it had maintaining altitude on one engine.

Nevertheless, the squadrons in the Tenth Air Force believed the advantages of the B-25H outweighed its disadvantages, particularly the improvement in forward-firing armament with eight 0.50-cal machine guns in addition to the 75 mm cannon. This made the H-model less of a bomber and more a flying artillery piece, ideal for low-level attacks on buildings, locomotives and river craft, as well as for supressing flak batteries ahead of other bombers attacking at low level.

The bombardier-nosed B-25J was clearly superior for medium altitude bombing, but equally good at low-level bombing, particularly if fighters were available to supress anti-aircraft fire. The ratio of H- to J-model

The Air Commando Bomber Section's aircraft No 11, named *Little 'Marge'*, shows 16 missions completed. The aeroplane's pilot, 1Lt Frank Merchant, stands second from left. Promoted to captain, Merchant would continue flying B-25s with the Air Commandos until late 1944 (*Author's collection*)

aircraft depended more on the type of operations being flown – medium altitude bombing would require more B-25Js than H-models, although it was suggested that the practice of using one J-model as the lead ship for two B-25Hs should continue. The ideal scenario would be to have a sufficient number of B-25Js for medium altitude bombing missions and a sufficient number of B-25Hs for low-level strafing missions.

The report recommended, however, that a medium bomber group contain three squadrons of B-25Js and one squadron of B-25Hs, although such a separation proved impractical for operations. Instead, the squadrons in the CBI tended to operate a mix of B-25Hs and B-25Js, migrating exclusively to the J-model after North America ended production of the B-25H.

As the battle of Imphal neared its end, Maj Gen Stratemeyer reorganised his Eastern Air Command, altering operational requirements. The biggest change was the return of the Tenth Air Force as an operational command to support Stilwell's continuing advance in north Burma, which by June 1944 had reached the town of Myitkyina, thus freeing Third Tactical Air Force from having responsibility for air operations in Stilwell's area. Stratemeyer transferred the 490th BS from the Strategic Air Force back to the Tenth Air Force as its only bomber squadron. To give Third Tactical Air Force more aircraft for the support of the Fourteenth Army, Stratemeyer also transferred the 12th BG from the Strategic Air Force to Third Tactical Air Force, giving it a potent force of medium bombers for interdiction.

These changes took place as the shattered divisions of the Japanese 15th Army began their retreat from Imphal, their offensive having ended in failure. British and Indian forces broke the encirclement on 21 June 1944 when troops from Imphal connected with XXXIII Corps advancing from Assam. Despite the monsoon, the Fourteenth Army's IV and XXXIII Corps then set off in pursuit of the retreating Japanese, who left their dead and wounded, abandoned artillery pieces and motor vehicles behind them. It was the IJA's worst ever defeat, with the 15th Army suffering more than 60,000 casualties, including 30,000 dead. This was a crippling blow that Allied air power had helped to inflict, while simultaneously sustaining the encircled British and Indian soldiers. The Japanese defeat at the battle of Imphal would create opportunities that few had thought possible only a few months before.

DISASTER IN CHINA

In China at the start of 1944 the future looked promising for the Allies. The anti-shipping campaign was accelerating, with the Fourteenth Air Force claiming Japanese vessels totalling 32,500 tons sunk during December 1943 alone. The transfer of additional medium bomber squadrons to China in the coming months offered the prospect of inflicting even more damage on the enemy. To control operations of the new bomber and fighter squadrons, the Fourteenth Air Force revised its command structure in December 1943, dividing China into two operational zones along the 108th Meridian that ran north to south to the east of Chungking, China's wartime capital. The 68th Composite Wing (CW) took responsibility for all operations to the east of the Meridian, while the 69th CW took over operations to the west, covering the Yunnan region and French Indochina.

Despite bad weather, the anti-shipping campaign remained a priority for the China-based B-25s. The squadrons would send out pairs of aircraft to search for vessels in the shipping lanes of the South China Sea. Here, a B-25's bombs straddle a Japanese freighter, which was part of a convoy under attack on a mission in February 1944 (*3A-02741, RG342H, NARA*)

In January the first B-25H models began to arrive in China to replace the older C- and the few G-models in-theatre. There were still shortages of parts of all kinds (a requisition request from the 11th BS noted plaintively that parts for the B-25's Wright Cyclone engines were 'hard to come by in this Theater'), despite tonnage flown over the 'Hump' to China having increased from 2000 tons in June 1943 to 12,000 tons in December. More work was to be undertaken within China to improve the flow of supplies from Kunming, the terminus of the 'Hump' route, to the Fourteenth Air Force bases in eastern China. With Allied advances in Europe and the Pacific, there was the prospect that more men and aeroplanes might finally flow to China.

As in Burma, the seasonal weather remained the perennial problem, particularly for the squadrons operating out of the eastern China air bases. For example, during the first four months of 1944 the 11th BS flew 15 missions in January and 25 in February, but only nine missions in March and seven in April due to the weather.

Nevertheless, the campaign against Japanese merchant shipping remained the priority for the medium bomber squadrons from January through to the end of April 1944. Of the 56 missions flown by the 11th BS during the period, 45 of them were sea sweeps over the East and South China Seas and river sweeps down the Yangtze. The 11th began the year with five sweeps of the middle Yangtze River, claiming eight vessels of various lengths destroyed and leaving a further five damaged. These low-level bombing and strafing missions were costly, however, with the unit losing two B-25s on the 10 January mission. The first aircraft destroyed was being flown by the flight leader, who was brought down by debris from an exploding tanker that he had just strafed – the bomber was seen to roll over and crash. Several hours later, on the second mission flown on the 10th, one of the B-25s involved went down to strafe a gunboat and was apparently hit by machine gun rounds that set an engine on fire. The Mitchell flew on for a few miles before slowly losing height and exploding when it hit the ground.

Sea sweeps brought more claims, bringing the total for January to nine merchant ships and one gunboat sunk.

The 2nd BS also had a productive start to the new year, with most of its claims for ships destroyed coming on three consecutive days toward the end of January. The unit also had some excitement on the 15th when Capt C M Conrad and his crew, flying one of the 2nd's new B-25Hs, claimed a Ki-21-IIB 'Sally' twin-engined bomber shot down during a sea sweep in bad weather. After several more fruitless patrols over the South China Sea, squadron CO Maj Thomas Foley, decided the unit should try its luck in the East China Sea off the mainland coast north of Formosa. On 23 January Foley and his wingman found a seven-ship convoy and claimed two 5600-ton freighters sunk with their eight 500-lb bombs. The next day Foley went out with five other B-25s, and although the weather was bad with the ceiling down to 300 ft, the pilots hit the jackpot, claiming five 300-ft freighters and a smaller vessels sunk. A post-war analysis of Japanese shipping losses confirmed that three merchant ships were in fact sunk on 24 January in the East China Sea.

In between attacks on the merchant vessels that day, an IJNAF E13A 'Jake' floatplane attacked Capt Derward Harper's B-25 from the rear quarter. Rising to the challenge, Harper out-manoeuvred his agile opponent – a remarkable feat in a heavy Mitchell – and damaged the Japanese floatplane with his front guns, forcing the 'Jake' to land on the sea below. Harper duly sunk the E13A with two of his bombs. On 25 January seven aircraft went out and claimed three more ships sunk. Tragically, the following day, on his way back to base after spending the night at Hengyang, Capt Harper flew his aircraft into a mountain in bad weather. There were no survivors.

As a result of these medium bomber attacks, Japanese merchant ships began sailing farther off the China coast outside the normal range of the B-25s. The Fourteenth Air Force responded with a new tactic, using the 308th BG's B-24s to act as long-range scouts for the Mitchell squadrons. When the Liberators found shipping, they would radio the location to the B-25s and initiate their own attack, with the Mitchells following up. To boost the range of the B-25s, groundcrews installed an additional fuel tank in the bomb-bay in place of two 500-lb bombs. The first trial of this tactic apparently took place on 5 February when two B-24s came across a convoy of 13 freighters and tankers. Two 11th BS B-25s responded and found the convoy, severely damaging two of the large freighters.

During the month the 11th had a run of sea sweeps without finding targets,

The 22nd and 491st BSs transferred to China in January 1944, remaining part of the Fourteenth Air Force until the end of the war. The 491st BS brought with it one of its veteran Mitchells, *OLD 59*, possibly B-25D 41-30159. This aeroplane flew more than 100 missions over Burma, and after completing 121 missions in-theatre it returned to the USA in March 1944 to undertake a tour promoting the purchase of war bonds (*3A-01453, RG342H, NARA*)

although it still managed to claim six merchant ships sunk, totalling 16,700 tons, and six more damaged. The 2nd BS had an equally busy month, claiming five freighters sunk, but it lost a B-25 in an attack on a large vessel in the Yangtze River on 29 February. Post-war analysis of Japanese shipping losses showed that the only vessel sunk on the dates of the squadron's claims was on 11 February when Capt William Carson hit the *Satsuma Maru*, a cargo ship of 3091 tons. He had estimated his target to be a 5600-ton vessel, which demonstrates the difficulty experienced by B-25 crews when it came to assessing the size of the ship they had attacked.

The 341st BG and its two squadrons, the 22nd and 491st, arrived in China toward the end of January and were assigned to the 69th CW, with their base at Yangkai, west of Kunming. The two B-25 units took over responsibility for sea sweeps over the Gulf of Tonkin and interdiction of the railway system in French Indochina, commencing operations during the first week of February from Nanning, near the border with French Indochina. Bad weather during the month took its toll, the 22nd BS losing three B-25s on 6 February when low cloud and radio problems forced the crews to bail out or crash-land on their way back to base. The 491st BS lost four aircraft to similar causes.

When the sea sweeps failed to turn up any shipping, the B-25s went back to the French Indochina coast, bombing bridges, harbours and railway facilities. The squadrons had their first successes against Japanese shipping on 13 February when three B-25Ds from the 491st BS and a new B-25H from the 22nd BS went to Hainan Island in search of enemy vessels. The 491st claimed direct hits on two smaller boats, believing one to have been left sinking. 22nd BS CO Maj Edison Weatherly, flying the B-25H, went after a large freighter and two smaller ships, dropping four 500-lb bombs and firing all 21 rounds from his 75 mm cannon and 1400 rounds from his 0.50-cal machine guns. Weatherly probably sank the 1381-ton *Shoka Maru*, which was lost on this date near Hainan Island. The squadrons claimed several more ships during the month, as well as extensive damage to targets in French Indochina, although the 22nd BS lost another B-25 in an attack on ships near Haiphong.

The poor weather during March and April limited flying for all the B-25 squadrons in China. The CACW gained two more medium bomber squadrons during this period, however. The 1st Bomb Squadron (M) Provisional finished its training in December 1943 and left for China in mid-January after receiving brand new B-25s, moving to the airfield at Erh Tong to join the 2nd BS. The unit commenced operations at the end of February, sending out several aircraft on missions with the 2nd and the 11th BSs. The 4th BS completed its training in March, and after receiving 12 new B-25Hs it flew to China at the end of March, arriving at Erh Tong on 6 April. It was not until month-end that the squadron flew its first combat missions, however.

The 3rd BS – the CACW's final medium bomber squadron – finally arrived in China in September 1944 when the logistical system in-country was at last able to sustain another medium bomber squadron, the unit having by then spent two months in India flying missions into Burma in support of Stilwell's Chinese divisions. Although the 3rd BS was delayed, the arrival of the 1st and 4th BSs was a valuable and timely addition to the Fourteenth Air Force.

In addition to carrying out sea sweeps over the Gulf of Tonkin, the 22nd and 491st BSs took on responsibility for interdicting the railway system in French Indochina. On 19 February 1944 the 22nd BS carried out a low-level attack against the road bridge and railway station at Ha Trung, south of Hanoi (*3A-02768, RG342H, NARA*)

While sea and river sweeps continued to be the priority for the medium bomber squadrons, they did not completely ignore the Fourteenth Air Force's other objective – destruction of the IJAAF and its installations. During March and April there were several attacks on enemy airfields and encounters with Japanese fighters. The 11th BS bombed Kai Tak airfield in Hong Kong on 11 February and made a low-level attack on the airfield at Kiungshan, on Hainan Island, where it claimed a number of aeroplanes destroyed on the ground.

The 22nd and 491st BSs went further afield on 5 March, undertaking an evening raid on the airfield at Chiengmai, in Thailand, and claiming nine aircraft destroyed on the ground. A B-25 from the 491st BS failed to return from the mission, and an aircraft from the 22nd BS crash-landed after ground fire knocked out its hydraulic system.

Eight days later, both units sent four aircraft each (this time with an escort of four P-40s) to bomb Kiungshan airfield. As the bombers approached the airfield at low level, they could see Japanese fighters taking off ahead of them. No fewer than 12 went after the bombers, the IJAAF pilots splitting up into two-ship elements to make attacks from the side and rear quarters, which were not pressed home. More determined frontal attacks resulted in the destruction of a B-25 from the 22nd BS, while a severely damaged 491st aircraft was written off in a crash-landing back at base. The 22nd claimed one fighter shot down, as did the 491st, whose gunners were also credited with two more as probables. During one frontal attack two pilots from the 491st turned into an oncoming Japanese fighter

New B-25H/Js began to arrive in China to replace the older B-25Ds in the early months of 1944, although a number of D-models would soldier on through to the end of the war. *"Gun Totin' Deacon*" was a new B-25J assigned to the 11th BS in April 1944 and damaged in a landing accident the following month (*3A-02588, RG342H, NARA*)

and opened fire with their front guns, damaging the aeroplane, which broke off the attack. The escorting P-40s claimed three 'Tojos' destroyed and three probably destroyed during the combat.

The 22nd BS ran into enemy fighters again on 6 April during a sea sweep around Hainan Island, when seven Japanese aircraft attacked two B-25Hs. Although the fighters followed the bombers for ten minutes, they did not press home their attacks. The next day several Mitchells from the 491st BS were attacked while also sweeping around Hainan Island. The gunners claimed one fighter as probably destroyed and a second damaged.

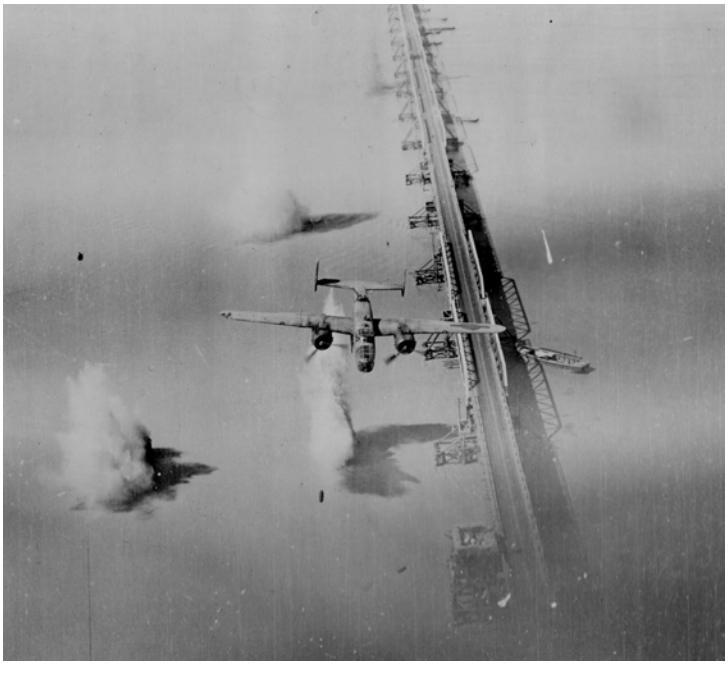
On 10 April two B-25s from the 11th BS were again searching for vessels in the same area when, shortly after attacking a tanker, they ran into seven fighters that crews identified as 'Tojos'. This time the Japanese fighters made determined attacks from head-on, firing until they were close to the bombers and then breaking off above or below them, even though the B-25s were at an altitude of only 500 ft. When Capt C J LaValle, flying the lead bomber, had his left engine shot out, wingman Lt Richard Gramling throttled back and remained with LaValle to provide cover. In a 20-minute battle, the B-25 gunners claimed four 'Tojos' shot down and three more as probables. Although both Mitchells were badly shot up, they made it back to base, LaValle flying for three-and-a-half hours on one engine.

During March the Fourteenth Air Force received disturbing reports of Japanese forces massing around the Yellow River, in the Hankow area, and around Canton. These were, in fact, the Japanese armies preparing for

Operation *Ichi-Go*. In April Chennault warned Stilwell of the possibility of a major Japanese advance to capture the railway line between the Yellow River and Hankow, and a further advance south of Hankow to capture Changsha, putting Chennault's eastern China airfields at risk. Chennault asked for more aviation supplies to be delivered over the 'Hump', but his request came at a time of crisis in Burma when the Japanese offensive against Imphal created a severe shortage of transport aircraft in the CBI. The theatre was also in the midst of preparations both for the planned Chinese advance on the Salween Front and the imminent arrival of the B-29 force under *Matterhorn*.

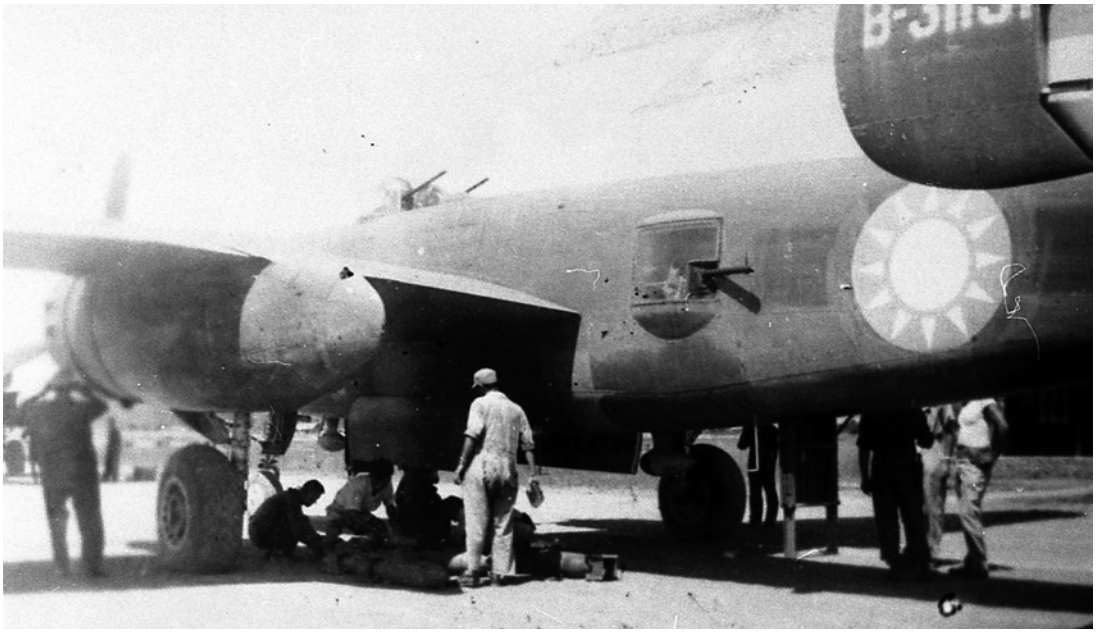
Supply shortages notwithstanding, the Fourteenth Air Force made preparations to deal with the pending Japanese offensive. During March it organised Mission A – a plan to move the 2nd BS, with a detachment from the 1st BS, and five CACW fighter squadrons to bases in northern China to repel the Japanese offensive. Chennault hoped to use this force to attack Japanese troop concentrations and railway and supply centres four days before Chinese intelligence estimated the planned offensive, Operation *Kogo*, was set to begin. Other squadrons in the 68th CW would be prepared to move to airfields closer to Hankow to attack a possible Japanese drive to the south.

On 17 April forces of the IJA's 12th Army crossed the Yellow River, and two days later they began their advance southward down the railway line toward Hankow, meeting little sustained opposition from the Chinese armies opposing them. The CACW squadrons assigned to Mission A had received no warning of the impending offensive, and bad weather prevented their movement to airfields in northern China until a week after the start of the Japanese advance. To make matters worse, the speed of the Japanese advance created a fluid situation where it was next to impossible to provide the Chinese armies with the close air support they so desperately needed in the frontline. Instead, the medium bombers and fighters went after the advancing Japanese troop columns, supply lines and railway marshalling yards in a vain attempt to slow down the enemy's rate of advance.



At the beginning of the Japanese offensive *Kogo* in north-central China, the 1st and 2nd BSs of the 1st BG moved to the airfield at Liangshan to begin supporting the Chinese armies attempting to resist the IJA advance. The bridge over the Yellow River carrying supplies for the Japanese armies became an important target. On this occasion a 2nd BS B-25 has just missed the bridge in a low-level run in June 1944 (*3A-02660, RG342H, NARA*)

The 2nd BS arrived at the airfield at Liangshan, northeast of Chungking, at the end of April with four D- and eight H-model B-25s. It also boasted four crews from the 1st BS. The unit commenced operations on 3 May, sending out seven B-25s on three separate missions to bomb and strafe concentrations of troops, trucks and tanks on the roads leading south from the Yellow River. For the rest of May the unit kept up



Bombing up a 1st BG B-25 with 100-lb bombs. The Mitchell squadrons flew many missions against Japanese columns in a forlorn effort to halt the offensive. The medium bombers went after river shipping, truck convoys and railway lines to interdict the flow of supplies (*Courtesy Carl Molesworth*)

these attacks, despatching pairs of B-25s to bomb and strafe the advancing Japanese columns. The 2nd BS mounted only two large missions in May, bombing the railway marshalling yard at Sinyang with great effect on the 5th and a large troop concentration later in the month. Bad weather forced the bombers to turn back on several occasions, but the unit nevertheless completed 20 smaller missions in May, with only one aircraft lost in a landing accident upon returning from a combat mission.

June brought more missions against railway marshalling yards, bridges over the Yellow River, supply dumps and Japanese-occupied towns, but by the end of the month Mission A no longer had a purpose, for enemy forces advancing from the north and from the south had linked up, giving IJA armies control over the rail corridor. The 2nd BS had lost no aeroplanes in combat in June, although four B-25s were destroyed and their crews killed when they crashed into a mountain in bad weather on their way to Liangshan. As was so often the case in the CBI, weather could be a deadlier enemy than the Japanese.

Instead of withdrawing back to eastern China, the 2nd BS remained at Liangshan. In early July the 1st BS moved from Erh Tong to the airfield at Peiyishi, near Liangshan, and it began flying missions from the site alongside the 2nd BS.

With the Japanese now in control of the rail corridor, the CACW medium bombers took on a new mission – interdicting the enemy's rail network.

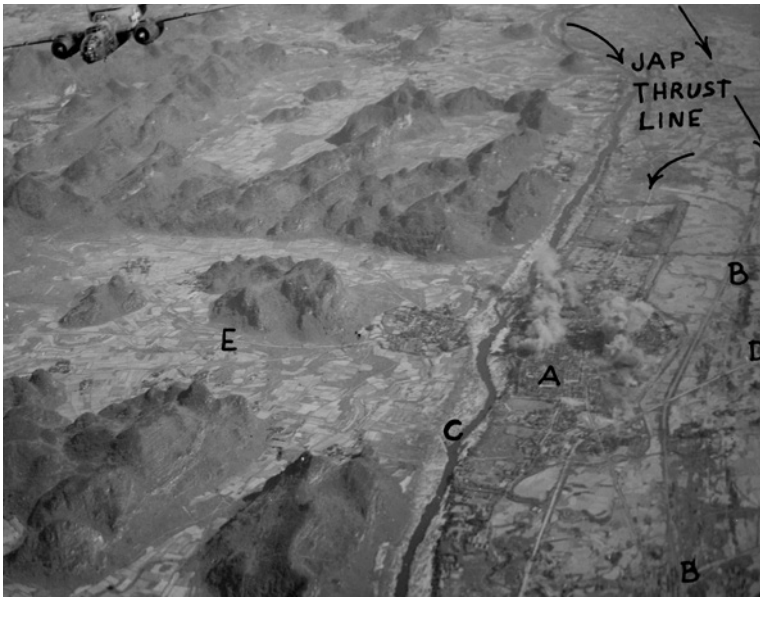
The success of Operation *Kogo* encouraged the IJA's China Expeditionary Army to begin Operation *Togo* (the second part of *Ichi-Go*). In the first phase of the campaign, the IJA planned on sending five divisions, followed by three more, to capture the key town of Changsha, on the Hankow–Canton railway line, and from there move further south to capture the rail hub and Fourteenth Air Force base

at Hengyang. The China Expeditionary Army marshalled more than 250,000 combat and support troops for *Togo*, which commenced on 27 May when the lead Japanese divisions started their advance, moving rapidly on a broad front against modest Chinese resistance. Aerial support was provided by IJAAF fighters and bombers. Changsha was captured on 18 June, and by the end of the month the China Expeditionary Army was nearing Hengyang.

In May Chennault had 377 fighters, 82 medium and 33 heavy bombers in the Fourteenth Air Force, although not all were operational. His critical need was for supplies, especially fuel for his forward squadrons. His pleas for a greater allocation of 'Hump' tonnage for the Fourteenth Air Force in view of the crisis facing his eastern China airfields resulted in deliveries of more than 12,000 tons of supplies in June, double the May figure, but with the poor internal supply system in-country, these stocks would not reach his forward bases for another month. Shortages of fuel would repeatedly disrupt medium bomber and fighter operations throughout the summer.

Chennault had organised a special task force in May consisting of the 23rd FG, the 308th BG, the 11th BS, elements of the 491st BS and, from the CACW, the 5th FG and the 3rd and 4th BSs. He placed it under the command of Col Clayton Vincent, with instructions to concentrate first on the destruction of IJAAF aircraft; second, shipping on the rivers to interdict the movement of enemy supplies; and third, troop columns, motor vehicles, trains, camps and supply dumps to slow the movements of the IJA divisions.

The medium bombers had already begun attacks on the Japanese lines of communications and IJAAF installations likely to support the offensive. At the end of April the 11th BS sent six B-25s to Hengyang. These and other Mitchells from the unit operating out of Kweilin, together with B-25s from the 1st BS, made attacks on Japanese airfields, barracks and storage areas, while continuing to mount sea sweeps that found few large merchant ships. When the *Togo* offensive began on 27 May, the 11th BS detachment at Hengyang found itself with a shortage of bombs and fuel. Poor weather conditions over the frontline areas also had an adverse impact on the unit's mission tempo, as did repeated IJAAF bombing raids on the airfield. The speed of the Japanese advance forced the detachment to leave Hengyang on 31 May. The next day a second detachment of B-25s from the 11th flew to the airfield at Lingling,



The B-25s kept up regular attacks on the railway marshalling yards along the lines supporting the main Japanese advance. For maximum effectiveness the bombers tried to wait until photo reconnaissance showed a back-up of locomotives and rolling stock in the yards (*3A-02653, RG342H, NARA*)

The 4th BS of the 1st BG arrived in China in time to begin supporting the effort against the *Ich-Go* offensives, flying out of bases around Kweilin. The Japanese advance on Kweilin forced the 4th and 11th BS to evacuate in mid-September 1944. This B-25H carries 34 mission markings and the 4th BS's insignia on the nose – unit insignia were a common feature of aircraft from the 1st and the 341st BGs in the CBI (*Courtesy Carl Molesworth*)

90 miles south of Hengyang, to commence operations in support of the beleaguered Chinese forces.

In mid-June the 491st BS, which had been operating out of Yangkai with the 22nd BS in support of the Chinese Y-Force on the Salween front in Burma, sent nine aircraft to Kweilin to operate alongside the 11th BS. The 491st detachment flew 19 missions out of Lingling before moving further south to the airfield at Liuchow, south of Kweilin, at the end of June. The 11th BS flew 52 missions during June, all in support of the Chinese armies.

The missions in June followed the priorities Chennault had assigned. Most were river sweeps, with two B-25s going out to search for small craft and sampans that the Japanese used to ferry troops and supplies, bombing and strafing vessels of all sizes with 75 mm cannon and 0.50-cal machine guns. On several missions the H-models took off with just a full load of 75 mm shells and no bombs, due to a shortage of the latter. These low-level missions often encountered anti-aircraft fire.

By this time newer J-model aircraft had begun to arrive in China to replace the older B-25Ds. On one mission a B-25J had a narrow escape when a large-calibre shell hit its left engine nacelle, leaving a huge hole, before continuing on into the fuselage, through the radio operator's desk and out the opposite side of the aeroplane without exploding.

With more IJAAF fighters covering the advancing IJA divisions, medium altitude missions to bomb Japanese supply dumps and railway marshalling yards now required an escort of P-51s or P-40s. On several missions enemy

fighters tried to intercept the bombers, but invariably the escorts would chase them off, leaving the bombers undamaged. In a new tactic designed to disrupt IJAAF operations, the 11th BS began flying night harassment sorties over the main Japanese airfields. When undertaking these missions, the B-25s would take off at intervals of 15 to 30 minutes apart and make individual attacks on the airfield, trying to hit the revetment areas, hangars and other buildings with fragmentation bombs and 500-lb bombs fitted with long-delay fuses.

Although Col Vincent's bombers and fighters went out nearly every day, they could only temporarily disrupt the Japanese advance due to their paucity in numbers. The IJA captured Hengyang airfield on 26 June and laid siege to the city itself, which remarkably held out. During the first week of July the 11th BS's B-25s dropped food, ammunition and medical supplies to the Chinese troops inside the city.

More night harassment missions were also flown over Japanese airfields, including the newly captured base at Hengyang. The 491st BS also began night missions to Tien Ho and White Cloud airfields near Canton, but with a growing shortage of fuel at the forward air bases the detachment left Liuchow on 10 July and returned to Yangkai, where it re-joined the 22nd BS supporting the Chinese on the Salween front. A lack of fuel eventually halted medium bomber operations for eight days in mid-July. When the situation eased towards the end of the month, the 11th BS flew one of its largest missions when 12 aircraft joined six B-25s from the 4th BS in an attack on the railway marshalling yards at Yochow. Two aircraft from the 11th had to turn back, and the Mitchells that reached Yochow dropped 60 per cent of their bombs on the target while their escorts fought off Japanese fighters.

Having suffered losses of troops, motor vehicles and river craft during daylight from strafing Fourteenth Air Force bombers and fighters, the IJA reverted to moving supplies along the roads and rivers at night to avoid air attack – during World War 2 the USAAF had only a limited ability to undertake nocturnal interdiction missions. Nevertheless, at the end of July the 11th BS began sending out its B-25s on road and river sweeps at night, using fragmentation and 100-lb demolition bombs.

A B-25H of the 3rd BS taxis out at the start of a mission. This unit was the last of the 1st BG's squadrons to enter combat, arriving in China in September 1944 after having spent several months supporting Stilwell's Chinese divisions fighting in northern Burma. For some reason the squadron adopted the American skunk, not native to China, as its insignia. Some of the 3rd BS's American pilots dubbed their unit the 'Spray and Pray' squadron after the skunk's common defensive reaction against predators (*Courtesy Carl Molesworth*)

These missions were extremely hazardous, and often involved following a road down a valley with high hills on either side. If they could find a convoy, B-25 crews would bomb from 1000–2000 ft, hopefully setting some trucks on fire that would then allow the Mitchells to return for strafing runs.

During August the 11th BS flew six night strafing missions, and it also started having crews patrol the roads upon their return from night harassment missions against other targets. At the end of the month seven aircraft went out on night road sweeps and found several lengthy enemy truck convoys travelling with their lights on. The B-25s claimed 180 trucks destroyed or damaged on 28 August and an additional 154 vehicles the following night. IJA drivers soon learned to leave their lights off.

The 11th BS continued experimenting with new applications for the B-25. In one instance a Mitchell on a night road sweep employed parachute flares to light up the road for fighters, with mixed success. On 28 July the squadron scrambled a B-25 in an attempt to intercept Japanese bombers targeting Kweilin, the Mitchell crew being directed in their pursuit of enemy aircraft by ground control radar. Two IJA bombers were sighted but contact could not be maintained long enough for them to be shot down. Ironically, one month later, a 4th BS B-25 on a night harassment mission serendipitously turned into a nightfighter.

During the first and last weeks of August, the 4th BS flew 42 night harassment sorties over Japanese airfields at Hankow, Pailuchi and Hengyang. On the night of 30 August, Capt Robert Bell had targeted Hengyang. After completing his bomb run at 4000 ft, Bell turned south to head for home. Ten miles south of the airfield he saw the running lights of an aeroplane coming towards him in the opposite direction at 3000 ft. As the aircraft passed underneath him, it flashed its recognition lights.

When the 491st and the 22nd BSs arrived in China they painted out the serial numbers on their aircraft and applied three-figure aircraft numbers instead. Aircraft 448 joined the 491st BS in the first half of 1944. The bomber wore the 491st BS's horseshoe insignia and its aircraft number on the left side of the fuselage (*Courtesy Tony Strotman*)

On several 491st BS B-25s, the crews painted more elaborate nose art on the right side of the fuselage where there was no squadron insignia to restrict the scope of their designs. Aircraft 448 had a large crowing rooster painted on it, along with the name *Rhode Island Red* – the state bird of the American state of Rhode Island, which probably reflected the home state of one of the crew (*Courtesy Tony Strotman*)

Bell, flying a B-25H, turned after the aeroplane and went in pursuit. He recognised his opponent as a Ki-48 'Lily' bomber and closed in just as it began turning to the right. Bell opened fire from 500 yards with his four 0.50-cal nose machine guns, closing to 300 yards. The 'Lily' pulled up and fell off to the right, seemingly out of control. Bell had to avoid Japanese anti-aircraft fire, so he was unable to follow the Ki-48 down. Two days later, however, Chinese sources confirmed his claim of one 'Lily' destroyed.

The efforts of the medium bombers and the fighters, which flew most of the sorties, came to naught. Hengyang fell on 8 August. There were simply too few aeroplanes and not enough fuel to make a difference given the magnitude of the Japanese offensive and the weakness of the Chinese armies opposing the advance. Between 1 June and 11 August the three B-25 squadrons in the 68th CW had flown 723 sorties. The 11th BS had completed 118 missions during this period, with more than half of these involving four aircraft or less.

The 11th BS, along with the 491st BS detachment at Liuchow and the 4th BS, continued flying intensively during August and into September, undertaking road and river sweeps and harassment missions to IJAAF airfields by night and bombing Japanese-held towns and supply dumps by day. Yet despite their efforts, the continued Japanese advance forced the 11th and 4th BSs to evacuate their bases at Kweilin on 14 September, the 11th moving further south to join the 491st BS detachment at Liuchow while the 4th BS headed northwest to fly alongside the other CACW 1st BG squadrons covering northern China.

The mission tempo remained high after these location changes, with the 11th BS completing 66 missions and the 491st BS detachment 44. Poor weather and a shortage of fuel sharply curtailed medium bomber operations during October, however, with the 11th managing only 25 missions and the 491st detachment just 16 from Liuchow. The fuel situation for the CACW medium bomber squadrons was even worse, with the 2nd BS flying only ten missions during October – all without escorting fighters, as they too were short of fuel. This meant that the B-25s could only engage the enemy when the cloud ceiling was low enough to offer them cover from Japanese fighters. The 1st BS managed just four missions in October as a result, while the 3rd and 4th BS were non-operational through a lack of fuel. This hiatus in bombing gave the Japanese time to repair the railway line from Peking to Hankow.

The fuel shortage and poor weather also hampered the 22nd BS flying from Yangkai. Indeed, it undertook just two missions during October, the squadron history remarking that it was 'a dismal month in a tragic year'.

The medium bombers at Liuchow now faced a new menace. The IJA had begun the second phase of Operation *Togo* on 16 August, and by early October the 23rd Army was advancing west out of Canton directly towards Liuchow and Kweilin in an attempt to link up with the 11th Army driving south from Hengyang, with the overall objective being the capture of both airfields. Despite this threat, the 11th BS and the 491st BS detachment kept up their night harassment missions over the Japanese airfields around Canton, and night sweeps down the rivers leading to the city, as well as attacks on nearby Japanese supply depots by night and day. On several missions the B-25s bombed concentrations of troops from the 23rd Army's leading divisions as they moved inexorably west.

While concentrating on supporting the Chinese armies resisting the Japanese offensives, the B-25 squadrons in China continued to go after Japanese merchant shipping when they could. On 16 October 1944, the 11th and 491st BSs carried out a low-level attack on shipping in Hong Kong harbour. Capt James Flanagan, flying a B-25H with the 491st BS, fired four 75 mm cannon shells into a large freighter, knocking out a deck gun firing at the Mitchells, and dropping three bombs on the ship, claiming one direct hit. This photograph shows the smoke stack of the vessel he attacked (*Courtesy Tony Strotman*)

Despite the need to harass the IJA's advance, the squadrons kept up their attacks on Japanese shipping while they still could. A dramatic mission took place on 16 October when three aircraft from the 491st BS and four from the 11th BS made a low-level skip bombing attack on enemy vessels in Hong Kong harbour, coordinated with a high-altitude B-24 attack on the Kowloon docks. As the Liberators began bombing, the Mitchells, which had been following the B-24s at medium altitude, dove down to come in over the harbour at 50 ft in a line abreast formation. In the two minutes it took the B-25s to reach the harbour, every gun on every ship opened up on them. During the 45-second crossing of the harbour itself, each Mitchell pilot picked out his own target and opened up with machine guns or, in the case of the four B-25Hs in the formation, 75 mm cannon. The 491st claimed one freighter probably sunk and two damaged, while the 11th BS claimed four freighters damaged. On this date the Japanese did lose the 1990-ton *Bunzan Maru*.

In an attempt to improve their luck on the sea sweeps, two aircraft from the 11th BS and two from the 491st detachment went out on 26 October, accompanied by a 308th BG B-24 equipped with search radar, in pursuit of a reported Japanese convoy. The Liberator duly located the convoy and all aircraft attacked, damaging several vessels and sinking the 2698-ton *Kaiko Maru*.

The Japanese advance forced the B-25s to leave Liuchow on 1 November – this was the 11th BS's fourth evacuation. Both it and the 491st BS detachment re-joined the 341st BG and the 22nd BS at Yangkai. The Japanese captured Liuchow and Kweilin on 11 November. Pushing south, the IJA overran the airfield at Nanning 13 days later. This

A 22nd BS B-25H lands at an airfield in China in late 1944. As with the other 341st BG squadrons in China, this aeroplane carries the unit insignia on the nose, an aircraft number on the tail and no serial number (*04340036, San Diego Air and Space Museum*)

left the Fourteenth Air Force with four small airfields in eastern China, which the capture of the Hankow–Canton corridor had now isolated and made entirely dependent on air supply. These last airfields would fall at the end of January 1945. By late 1944 the Japanese had effectively achieved the objectives of Operation *Ichi-Go*. They had captured the main Fourteenth Air Force airfields in east China, connected the Peking–Hankow and Hankow–Canton railway lines, opened a rail link with French Indochina and inflicted a severe mauling on the Chinese armies.

In the end, however, these victories had little strategic value. The movement of the B-29s to new bases in the Marianas removed the danger of the eastern China airfields being required for the bombing campaign against Japan, while the depredations of the US Navy's submarines proved to be far more damaging to Japanese merchant shipping than the sea sweeps mounted from these same bases.

More importantly, while the *Ichi-Go* offensive had strained the Fourteenth Air Force to the limit, it was actually stronger at the end of 1944 than it had been at the beginning of the year. The increasing flow of men and supplies to China gave promise of more offensive power in the months to come. In January 1944, the Fourteenth had 38 medium bombers split between two medium bomber squadrons. By the end of the year this force had grown to around 100 aircraft in seven squadrons now equipped with B-25H/Js (although a few of the older B-25Ds lingered on until the end of the war). The 'Hump' tonnage allocated to the Fourteenth Air Force had grown from 7601 tons in January 1944 to 16,578 tons in December, and would go beyond 20,000 tons in January 1945. This would give the Fourteenth Air Force the ability to carry out more intensive operations, although shortages of fuel would continue to be a problem. With the loss of the eastern China airfields, the Fourteenth Air Force's campaign against Japanese merchant shipping became more difficult, but also less necessary as the liberation of the Philippines from October 1944 provided bases for air attacks on shipping off the China coast. More and more of the Fourteenth Air Force's effort in 1945 would be directed to denying the Japanese the use of their newly captured rail corridor.

CHAPTER THREE

VICTORY IN BURMA, DELAY IN CHINA

The 22nd BS flew shuttle missions between their base in China at Yangkai and the airstrip at Tingkawk Sakan in northern Burma, re-fuelling and re-arming at Tingkawk Sakan and bombing another target in northern Burma on their way back to Yangkai. These missions gave the 22nd BS crews a chance to trade fresh eggs from China for American rations in Burma. Here, a 22nd BS aircraft taxis out for take-off (*Peter M Bowers Collection, Museum of Flight*)

In June 1944, the American and British Combined Chiefs of Staff issued a new directive to Adm Mountbatten instructing him to develop and protect the air route to China and to 'press advantages against the enemy by exercising maximum effort ground and air' during the monsoon and after, although the Combined Chiefs did not say specifically where to do so. There were two principal offensives underway. The Fourteenth Army was about to complete the defeat of the IJA's 15th Army assault on Imphal and begin pursuit of the retreating Japanese formations back to the Chindwin River. In northern Burma, Stilwell and his Chinese divisions had pushed south from Assam and were now laying siege to the town of Myitkyina, an American-Chinese force having captured the airfield there in a *coup de main* on 17 May. Right behind Stilwell's Chinese divisions, American engineers were building the road from Ledo, in Assam, that would link up with the old Burma Road and restore overland communications to China. This effort continued to be an Allied priority.

There remained the question of future objectives for the Fourteenth Army, however. When he realised the magnitude of the 15th Army's defeat, Gen William Slim, commanding the Fourteenth Army, conceived of a bold

The Northern Combat Area Command called on the B-25 squadrons to bomb Japanese concentrations around Myitkyina during the two-and-a-half-month siege of the town. The 12th BG sent out 34 aircraft on 29 July 1944 to drop a mix of 500- and 1000-lb bombs on Japanese strongpoints around the town. This photograph shows the 434th BS's pattern on the target area (*Army Air Forces, India-Burma Theatre, File 825.08, AFHRA*)

plan to pursue the retreating Japanese troops into the central Burma plain and there, in the more open country, bring the IJA's Burma Area Army to battle and shatter its divisions, paving the way for the liberation of the country. This plan became Operation *Capital*.

What Stilwell had hoped would be a lightning seizure of Myitkyina turned into a gruelling two-and-a-half-month siege against tenacious Japanese defenders. Close air support became critical as the besieging force lacked tanks and artillery. The medium bombers tried to help, but this was a job for the Tenth Air Force's fighter-bomber squadrons. The B-25s did fly missions against Japanese-held areas away from the frontlines, as well as staging areas and supply dumps nearby Myitkyina. Indeed, the squadrons of the 12th BG and the 490th BS spent most of July undertaking missions to Myitkyina. A flight of nine B-25s could saturate an area with up to 216 100-lb or 72 500-lb bombs. Since the Japanese had next to no anti-aircraft guns at Myitkyina, the bombers could come in at low level to increase their bombing accuracy. The 12th BG would often send out three squadrons to bomb Myitkyina, dropping 67 tons on the town on 28 July.

Japanese fighters made sporadic attacks in the defence of Myitkyina, with the 83rd BS having the misfortune to run into one of these sweeps on 9 July, losing a B-25 to the IJAAF. The crew managed to crash-land their aircraft near the town and walk to safety. After Myitkyina finally fell on 3 August, Stilwell decided to give his Chinese divisions a rest before resuming their advance toward the Burma Road after the end of the monsoon.

While the 12th BG and the 490th BS were flying missions to Myitkyina, the 22nd and 491st BSs had been supporting the advance of the Chinese divisions in Y-Force in Yunnan across the Salween River into Burma. The objective was to gain control of the Burma Road south toward Lashio to meet up with Stilwell's Chinese and American force pushing east from Myitkyina. The Y-Force divisions aimed at capturing the Japanese strongholds at Tengchung (a walled town), Lungling, Mangshih and Wanting, but this took time, and progress of the advance was painfully slow. The fighters and medium bombers of the 69th CW, flying from Yangkai and Yunnanyi, provided badly needed air support to the Chinese forces, as they lacked heavy artillery and had no tanks. The B-25s pounded the Japanese-held towns repeatedly and went after bridges leading to the Salween front and Japanese troop concentrations and hill positions blocking the advance, commencing their support of Y-Force in mid-May. These missions would continue until January 1945.

Tengchung proved to be a particularly tough nut to crack, with Chinese troops enduring more than a month of bitter fighting before the town was finally captured. The 22nd and 491st BSs began bombing the town toward the end of May, although the monsoon limited missions during June. The B-25s went back to Tengchung for five missions in the first half of July before weather brought operations to a halt. At the end of the month the squadrons flew several combined operations against Japanese positions in the town, and they were also called on to breach the surrounding walls – their ordnance added to the damage fighter-bombers had previously inflicted on the town.

The walled town of Tengchung provided the Japanese with a strong defensive position, which the B-25s bombed regularly. On 26 and 29 July 1944 a flight of nine Mitchells came in at 50 ft to drop 1000-lb bombs to breach the town wall. This photograph shows two B-25s pulling up after dropping their bombs (*3A-02752, RG342H, NARA*)

On 26 July, in one of their biggest missions to date, 26 B-25s from the 22nd and 491st BSs bombed Tengchung. Three flights of 17 bombers went in at 1350 ft to drop 254 100-lb demolition bombs and fragmentation clusters. The fourth flight of nine B-25s came in immediately after at 50 ft to drop 16 1000-lb bombs directly on the town wall, achieving several breaches. Three days later, three aircraft from the 22nd BS and four from the 491st BS returned to Tengchung and repeated the same attack. Finally, on 2 August, seven aircraft from the 22nd and six from the 491st made low-level attacks on the town wall with 1000-lb bombs, leaving five breaches in their wake. Chinese troops captured the town the next day.

To take advantage of the greater fuel supplies available at the Tenth Air Force's advanced airfields in Burma, and the ability to carry heavier bomb loads as a result, the 22nd BS began flying shuttle missions from the airfields at Yangkai and Yunnanyi to the Tenth Air Force fighter strip at Tingkawk Sakan. The B-25s would take off from China, bomb a target on the Salween front and then land at Tingkawk Sakan to re-arm and re-fuel, before attacking a second target on their way back to base. This led some enterprising crews to add 'egg runs' to their missions. The crews would load up with chickens' eggs at their bases in China and, while their aircraft were being re-fuelled and re-armed at Tingkawk Sakan, they would borrow a jeep and search out the messes of USAAF engineer units along the Ledo Road, trading their eggs for fresh bread, beer and American canned goods rarely available in China. These shuttle missions and egg runs continued until the end of December 1944. The Salween campaign was over by the end of January 1945, and on 4 February the first convoy of trucks from India arrived at Kunming.

Plans for the NCAC called for the Chinese divisions around Myitkyina to continue their advance in early October after the end of the monsoon season, with the objective being the clearance of Japanese forces from northern Burma to complete the link-up of the Ledo Road with the Burma Road. Destroying the lines of communications to the Japanese

The 22nd and 491st BSs spent several months supporting the advance of the Chinese Y-Force across the Salween River into northern Burma. Many of their missions saw them bomb Japanese-occupied towns along the old Burma Road. On 29 September 1944, this 22nd BS B-25H participated in a mission against Mengshih. The sharksmouth was a popular addition to Fourteenth Air Force aircraft (*3A-01035, RG342H, NARA*)

divisions opposing Stilwell's forces became a priority mission for the Tenth Air Force's fighter-bombers and the 490th BS.

In spite of the continued monsoon weather, the 490th returned to bridge-busting in the first week of August after a break of 72 days to fly ammunition to Imphal and support the siege of Myitkyina. Using their 'Glip bombing' method with 1000-lb bombs, the squadron destroyed or rendered unserviceable ten bridges on 1 and 3 August, adding another six destroyed over the subsequent weeks. Although the weather worsened in September, the unit completed 20 missions, adding more bridges to its total but losing one aircraft on 11 September when four B-25s attacking a bridge at Hsenwi on the old Burma Road ran into heavy anti-aircraft fire as they came in at low level.

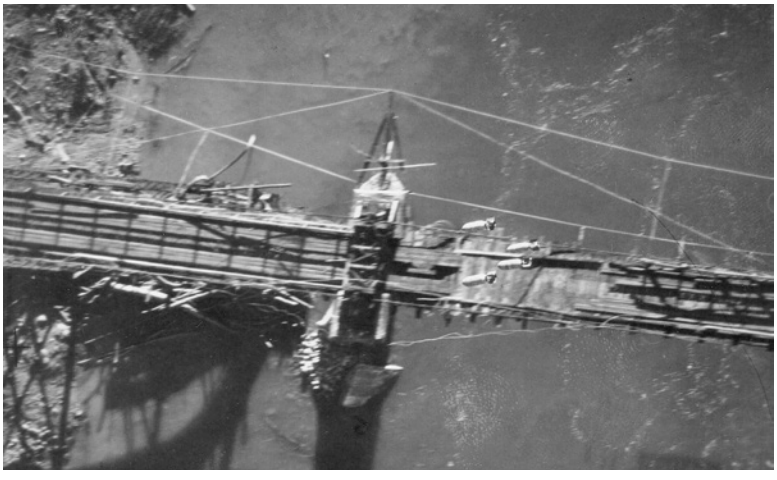
To reduce the risk of low-level attacks where there might be heavy ground fire, the squadron began sending in a flight of B-25s at medium level to saturate the flak positions with 100-lb (45 kg) demolition and fragmentation bombs just before the low-level bombers made their runs on the bridge. Although the B-25s had come back to strafe the positions after dropping their bombs, four of the low-level bombers were damaged, one severely. In addition to bridges, the B-25s bombed Japanese storage areas, troop concentrations, headquarters and railway installations. On several of these missions the 490th experimented with using rockets, although pilots found them to be inaccurate if fired from a distance in excess of 1800 ft from a target.

In order to be closer to their operating area, the 490th moved to airfields in Assam, and later to the advance field at Warazup, in Burma along the Ledo Road. To augment the fighter-bombers and the 490th BS, the Tenth Air Force called on the B-25 squadrons of the 12th BG to hit targets along the railway line leading south from Myitkyina.

The NCAC offensive resumed on 15 October 1944. One route of the advance was toward the Burma Road and the second down the railway line from Myitkyina to Indaw and Mandalay. The 490th BS continued its attacks on bridges, the B-25s with their longer range targeting those along the Burma Road and beyond, leaving the closer targets to the fighter-bombers. The unit had several excellent days, destroying four bridges on 12 October and four again on 30 October, and a productive railway sweep on 24 October when eight B-25s bombed and strafed targets of opportunity along the line, returning with claims of nine locomotives damaged. The squadron lost three B-25s on low-level missions in October, however.

November was a record month, with 15 bridges destroyed or rendered unserviceable, bringing the 490th's total to more than 100 destroyed or

made unserviceable. During December the squadron broke its own records, knocking out 25 bridges in total, including eight on a single day. With so many bridges out, the 490th attacked railway facilities instead, damaging marshalling yards, locomotives and rolling stock in bombing and strafing attacks. For its work developing the low-level 'Glip bombing' technique, and its record of 56 bridges destroyed between January and May 1944, the 490th received a highly coveted Distinguished Unit Citation (DUC) from the USAAF at the end of the year.



After a hiatus of some months, the 490th BS went back to bridge bombing in northern Burma ahead of the advancing Chinese divisions. This photograph shows four 500-lb bombs heading straight for a bridge under repair near Lashio. Regular photographic coverage of key bridges would alert the squadron when it was time for a return bombing mission (*3A-37568, RG342H, NARA*)

With Tenth Air Force fighter-bombers and the B-25s covering northern Burma during much of the day, the IJA switched to transporting its supplies by road and rail at night. To counter this, the 490th began flying night intruder missions during periods of moonlight – the first series of sorties began on 27 November and lasted until 6 December. The B-25s used Myitkyina as a forward base, with two aircraft going out each night at intervals. Following the railway lines and roads, the B-25s found several trains and vehicle convoys that it bombed with fragmentation clusters from 1500 ft to 4000 ft, before coming back to strafe targets with machine guns and 75 mm cannon. On the night of 2 December one of the attacking B-25s had the good fortune to find an ammunition train stopped near a bridge. Fragmentation bombs and strafing passes started several fires and then large explosions. The flames could still be seen when the aeroplane was 80 miles away on its way back to Myitkyina.

Encouraged by these results, the squadron sent four more aircraft to Myitkyina on the next moonlight period at the end of December. During their week of flying nocturnal missions from here, the B-25s came across truck convoys nearly every night, which they bombed and strafed. At the end of January 1945, the 490th sent out several more night missions, which again attacked a handful of convoys.

The 12th BG flew many missions in support of the Fourteenth Army's advance into central Burma, bombing Japanese supply depots and railway facilities using pattern bombing to saturate a target area with demolition, incendiary and fragmentation bombs. On 5 November 1944 the town of Kinu was attacked by 35 B-25s, which dropped 93,000 lb of bombs in the target area (*3A-37581, RG342H, NARA*)

January proved to be yet another record month for the 490th BS, with 42 missions completed, 301 sorties flown, 425 tons of bombs dropped and 260,910 rounds of 0.50-cal ammunition expended, but at a cost of five aircraft lost. Three of the B-25s destroyed were downed during attacks on Japanese airfields in Burma. The squadron had contributed to the counter-air effort with several attacks on IJAAF bases

The 12th BG's B-25H *KID SISTER* had completed more than 90 missions by March 1945. The group's squadrons would fly several missions for consecutive days and then have a stand-down for 24 hours. Flying mission after mission, the aeroplanes built up impressive tallies recorded on the fuselage alongside creative nose art (*GP-12-HI-(BOMB)-II, AFHRA*)

during the previous few months, but with Allied ground forces moving into central Burma, the need to interdict Japanese air operations became a priority.

On 5 January, the 490th sent out 16 B-25s – its largest mission ever – to make low-level attacks on three airfields, dropping 500- and 1000-lb bombs to render the runways temporarily unserviceable. The Mitchells came in at 250 ft and encountered heavy ground fire, which damaged eight aeroplanes and caused one crew to bail out on their way back to base. The squadron went out to bomb an airfield at low level again on 18 January, dropping 48 1000-lb bombs on its runways and strafing anti-aircraft positions as they flew across the field, and this time four aircraft received damage. One B-25 left the target area with an engine smoking, and it was last seen descending to lower altitude, after which the remaining crews witnessed a large explosion a few minutes later. A second aircraft had its hydraulics shot out and its undercarriage damaged, forcing the pilot to make a crash-landing at Warazup, where the bomber burst into flames shortly after the crew had escaped without harm. The 490th subsequently flew five more missions against enemy airfields, although these attacks were all carried out at medium altitude, with 1000-lb bombs dropped on runways and revetments.

The 490th BS's final two months of combat over Burma were just as busy. During February the unit raised its bridge total to 148 destroyed or unserviceable, but lost four aircraft and their crews in the process – the highest level of attrition in the squadron's history. One aircraft hit a tree on its bomb run on a bridge, knocking six feet off the right wing and sending the aircraft down to its destruction in a fiery explosion. A second B-25 lost an engine, possibly to ground fire, and was destroyed in a crash-landing. The remaining two aircraft simply failed to return from missions. During the month the unit again tried a new tactic. Having had success with night missions, it sent out several aircraft at dawn to look for targets of opportunity, catching several trucks on the roads before they could hide.

March brought a record weight of bombs dropped and the 490th's 500th combat mission in a little over two years of operations. But with the opening of the land route to China, the ground campaign in northern Burma was effectively over, and with it the mission of the Tenth Air Force. There were fewer targets available, apart from Japanese troop concentrations when they could be located, and road sweeps were more often than not coming back without result. The 490th flew its last bridge-busting mission on 1 April 1945, claiming one road bridge destroyed and a second damaged. With little left to do in Burma, the unit transferred to China to re-join the 341st BG and the Fourteenth Air Force.

THIRD TACTICAL AIR FORCE

The mission of the Third Tactical Air Force was to support the Fourteenth Army's advance into Burma, providing close and indirect air support to IV and XXXIII Corps pushing down from Imphal toward the Chindwin River and XV Corps in the Arakan. Gen Stratemeyer had agreed to transfer the 12th BG from the Strategic Air Force to the Third Tactical Air Force to give it more striking power, especially for interdiction.

In defensive air battles over the Arakan and Imphal and long-range counter-air operations into central Burma, RAF and USAAF fighters had wrested air superiority from the IJAAF. While continuing the counter-air effort, the Third Tactical Air Force could now turn more of its attention to close air support and interdiction. As the Fourteenth Army pushed deeper into Burma, further from its land lines of communication and ever more dependent on air supply, weakening the Japanese forces opposing the advance became more critical.

Interdiction concentrated on isolating the battlefield, denying the flow of supplies to the Japanese armies and destroying the supplies that did get through. The longer range B-24s of the 7th BG and additional RAF heavy bomber squadrons continued to go after targets in southern Burma and Thailand, while the B-25s of the 12th BG focused their efforts on targets in central Burma and closer to the front. The B-25 group could send out its four squadrons separately to cover more targets, or despatch two or three squadrons to a single target to saturate the area with different types of bombs. This tactic, developed during the 12th's service in North Africa, was called 'pattern bombing' and involved the squadrons dropping their ordnance in a rectangle-shaped area measuring one-quarter-mile by one-half-mile. The group's success with pattern bombing had earned it the nickname the 'Earthquakers'.

In an attack on the town of Monywa, on the Chindwin River, in mid-September 1944, the 81st BS dropped 102 250-lb bombs, the 82nd BS dropped 40 1000-lb (454 kg) bombs and the 434th BS dropped 88 500-lb (225 kg) bombs onto a relatively small area from medium altitude, which increased the accuracy of the bombing.

To be closer to the area of operations, the 12th BG's squadrons moved to bases east of Calcutta nearer to the India–Burma border.

The 12th returned to the interdiction mission after the capture of Myitkyina in early August 1944. The squadrons directed their first efforts against the towns along and near the Chindwin River that housed supplies for the 15th Army's retreating divisions, hitting the supply dumps and conducting river sweeps to destroy craft moving materiel. At the same time, and for the next several months, the group's squadrons went after the railway lines bringing supplies to the 15th Army. This entailed bombing the marshalling yards and railway installations at the important junctions on the lines leading to the Chindwin River, saturating the marshalling yards with demolition bombs of various weights, as well as fragmentation and incendiary bombs, in order to create maximum destruction. To further disrupt the flow of supplies the squadrons would cut the lines between the major stations, elements of three aircraft taking a section of line to create breaks using 100- and 250-lb spike bombs. Breaks in the line brought traffic to a halt, allowing the B-25s and

the fighter-bombers to attack rolling stock and locomotives stranded between stations.

Railway bridges were also an important target, but oddly the 12th BG's squadrons do not seem to have adopted the 490th BS's 'Glip bombing' technique for some time, more often than not bombing from medium altitude, despite meagre results.

When called on, the B-25s would also bomb Japanese troop concentrations or positions in the jungle that the British Army had designated, using combinations of demolition and fragmentation bombs, 325-lb depth charges and, in one instance, oil bombs made by attaching fins to a 55-gallon drum loaded with oil, gasoline and an explosive device.

With four squadrons available, the 12th BG could maintain a high mission tempo, the number of B-25 sorties increasing from a low of 692 during the monsoon in July to 1477 in the dry weather of December.

Remarkably, during the post-monsoon operations, the group's B-25s had only one real battle with IJAAF fighters – an indication of the ascendency of Allied fighters over their Japanese opponents. On 6 October, as the 83rd BS neared a bridge target close to Mandalay, 12 Ki-43s fighters from the 64th Sentai jumped the bomber formation and kept up their attacks for one hour and 15 minutes. With no escorts to call on, the bombers jettisoned their ordnance, turned back toward their base and braced themselves for the attack.

Capt Saburo Nakamura, commanding the 1st Chutai, made a head-on attack against the formation with his wingman. In this first pass the two 'Oscar' pilots slightly damaged three of the B-25s and hit a fourth in the starboard engine. This aeroplane left the formation and gradually lost height until it crashed minutes later. On his second attack Nakamura came in from behind the formation, only to be killed instantly by a round to the head from one of the B-25 tail gunners. The remaining fighters made repeated head-on attacks on the bombers, although without inflicting any serious damage to them. The Mitchell gunners claimed three fighters destroyed and four probably destroyed, while their Japanese opponents claimed two B-25s shot down. At the time of his death, Capt Nakamura was the 64th Sentai's leading ace with more than 20 confirmed victories to his name.

In December 1944 the 1st ACG's Night Intruder Section began flying sorties into Burma searching for Japanese trains and convoys travelling by night to avoid air attack. These B-25Hs were preparing to support the Fourteenth Army's crossing of the Irrawaddy River in February 1945 (*3A-33714, RG342H, NARA*)

November saw the return of the Air Commando B-25s to combat. After several months' rest, the 1st ACG underwent a reorganisation that saw it assigned two fighter squadrons, a transport squadron and three liaison squadrons as its standard force makeup. For some reason the Bomber Section did not become a separate squadron, being instead turned into the Bomber/Night Intruder Section instead and tasked with carrying out nocturnal interdiction missions using seven new B-25Hs.

For night intruder missions, the Night Intruder Section B-25Hs carried fragmentation clusters that were effective against truck convoys when they could be found in the dark. Here, the armament crew are preparing to load the clusters into the bomb-bay for the night's mission (*3A-33914, RG342H, NARA*)

As in other areas of Burma and China, the IJA had by now learned to travel by night in central Burma in order to avoid the depredations of Allied fighter-bombers and medium bombers who now commanded the skies. The Night Intruder Section began flying road and railway sweeps during the periods of moonlight, when the pilots could locate truck convoys or trains. On moonlight nights the Section would send out three to four aircraft individually, each one assigned a specific section of road or railway line to cover.

During their first night missions the B-25s did great damage to locomotives and rolling stock with their 0.50-cal machine guns and 75 mm cannon, and dropped fragmentation bombs on Japanese supply areas. During the second series of operations in late December, the Night Intruder Section found even more lucrative targets, returning with claims for 11 locomotives destroyed and 13 damaged, 41 goods wagons destroyed and 131 damaged, and 72 motor vehicles destroyed and 138 damaged.

The Japanese reacted aggressively to these intruder sorties, opening fire whenever they heard the sound of an aeroplane engine. The Night Intruder Section's B-25s flew without any camouflage, remaining in their natural metal finish, which may have made them easier to spot in the moonlight. Nevertheless, only one aircraft was downed on these missions, the B-25 losing an engine after it was hit during a strafing run. The pilot made it back to British lines, where the crew bailed out successfully.

During the last ten days of January 1945 the number of convoys and trains detected dropped as the IJA took more precautions, ensuring that their convoys travelled without lights. The Japanese gunners also stopped using tracers, which meant that B-25 crews would often not know that they were being fired at until they were hit. Six aircraft received damage, one seriously, although all the Mitchells involved still made it back to base. Despite fewer targets, the Night Intruder Section managed to submit claims for 13 more locomotives, 44 goods wagons and 76 vehicles destroyed.

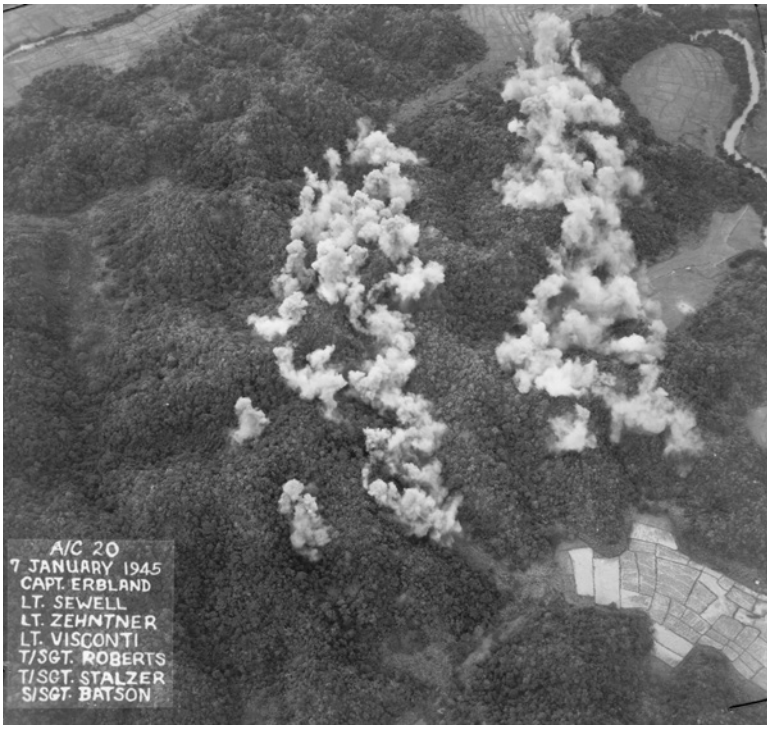
By the end of 1944, a new appreciation of the Burma Area Army's intentions caused Gen Slim to change his plans. He had hoped to bring the Japanese to battle in the Shwebo plain, a large area of relatively open country to the west of Mandalay and the Irrawaddy River, which bisects

central Burma. The continued Japanese withdrawal from the Chindwin River, which the Fourteenth Army reached in November, made Slim realise that the IJA was not about to fight a battle on ground that favoured its opponent. Instead, the enemy would seek to delay any confrontation until the onset of the next monsoon.

To force the Burma Area Army into battle before then, Slim decided to have the Fourteenth Army's XXXIII Corps advance on Mandalay as the Japanese expected him to do, while surreptitiously sending IV Corps to cross the Irrawaddy River farther west and advance rapidly through Japanese lines to capture the Burma Area Army's key supply centre at Meiktila. The latter sat astride the railway line to Rangoon and covered any possible routes of retreat from Mandalay to the south. It was a bold plan not without significant risks, but with air supply and air support Slim was confident his British and Indian Army divisions and his two tank brigades could defeat the Japanese in battle.

To add to the air support Slim's forces would need, Stratemeyer transferred operational control of the 12th BG from the Third Tactical Air Force to No 221 Group, RAF, which was tasked with providing air support to IV and XXXIII Corps. The 1st ACG (including the Night Intruder Section's B-25s), intended for exactly the type of envelopment by air that Slim had in mind for the capture of Meiktila and assigned to directly support IV Corps, would play an important part in the plan.

During January 1945, as IV and XXXIII Corps began their movement toward Meiktila and Mandalay, the 12th BG's squadrons flew nearly every day to bomb bridges on the roads and railway lines leading to both towns, as well as targeting the marshalling yards that served these lines to help isolate the battlefield. By this time the group's squadrons had switched to bombing bridges from lower levels due to the reduced risk posed by ground fire, attacking from altitudes of between 400 ft and 900 ft.



During January 1945 the Fourteenth Army called on the 12th BG to attack Japanese troop concentrations in the Arakan and also support IV Corps' advance to the Irrawaddy. The B-25s would be directed to bomb a target area in the jungle-covered hills. With little risk of anti-aircraft fire, the bombers could often come down to lower altitudes to increase their accuracy. This photograph shows the bombing pattern from an 81st BS B-25 in January 1945 (*SQ-BOMB-81-HI, January 1945, AFHRA*)

To reduce the risk of Japanese aircraft interfering with the advance, in the middle of the month the group spent five days targeting IJAAF airfields in central Burma, cratering the runways and revetment areas with 500-lb bombs, with each squadron taking on a specific airfield or landing ground.

There were also regular missions flown against Japanese troop concentrations and defensive positions at the request of the Fourteenth Army. When the advance brigades from IV Corps ran

into determined opposition at the small town of Gangaw, the 12th BG sent all four squadrons in to bomb the enemy positions. The mission called for tight timing, with each squadron having just eight minutes to place its bombs in the target area so that the ground forces could launch an advance before the Japanese troops recovered. In a well-coordinated attack, the squadrons dropped 72 1000-lb bombs and 108 500-lb bombs on Gangaw, allowing the troops to break through with only two wounded. This mission earned the group praise from Gen Slim for the crews' excellent bombing. Toward the end of the month the 12th BG bombed more Japanese troop concentrations along the Irrawaddy River, using pattern bombing to saturate the designated target area with hundreds of demolition, fragmentation and incendiary bombs.

During the advance to the Irrawaddy and to Meiktila, the Night Intruder Section flew bombing and strafing missions by day in addition to their night intruder sorties. The winged bomb symbols beneath the cockpit of this B-25H indicate night sorties, while the bottles below are for daytime missions (*National Museum of the US Air Force*)

The battle for Meiktila commenced on 14 February 1945 when the 7th Indian Division began crossing the Irrawaddy River to seize a bridgehead. The 1st ACG's Night Intruder Section B-25s went out by day, joining the fighters of the 1st and 2nd ACGs in providing close air support for the 7th Division. The Mitchells attacked at low level, bombing and strafing Japanese positions under the direction of British Visual Control Posts (VCPs) and spending a week working with the Air Commando fighters.

The 12th BG continued bombing Japanese positions up and down the Irrawaddy River, from Mandalay to the towns south of the 7th Division's crossing point, as well as attacking bridges leading to the battle area. During the month its squadrons also began flying night harassment missions to disrupt the Japanese lines of communications, joining the Night Intruder Section's efforts to reduce motor vehicle traffic at night. In February the B-25s flew 2227 sorties – a record for the air war in Burma.

The 17th Indian Division, which had broken out of the 7th Division's bridgehead to launch the attack on Meiktila, captured the town on 3 March and soon came under repeated Japanese counter-attacks. As the fighting around Meiktila and Mandalay intensified, the 12th BG's squadrons stepped up their attacks on Japanese storage dumps supporting the IJA divisions. By this time the cumulative effect of constant interdiction of the enemy's lines of communication by USAAF and RAF medium and long-range bombers had reduced the amount of supplies coming into the country for the Burma Area Army to around 200 tons a day – much less than the Japanese divisions required. At the same time, the 12th BG continued to target bridges, sending out three-aircraft elements to make low-level attacks that kept the key bridges knocked out or, at the very least, unserviceable for a period of a few days.

As the Fourteenth Army's divisions advanced deeper into central Burma in January 1945, the 12th BG went after IJAAF airfields to render them temporarily unserviceable. The 83rd BS targeted the airfield at Anisakan on 17 January 1945, achieving a good pattern directly on the middle section of the runway (*3A-37505, RG342H, NARA*)

The battles for Meiktila and Mandalay came to a successful conclusion toward the end of March. The

A veteran B-25H of the 81st BS crosses the Irrawaddy River after bombing the town of Sagaing, now wreathed in smoke and dust. During February the 12th BG's squadrons and the Air Commando's Night Intruder Section flew a record 2227 sorties in support of the Fourteenth Army (*SQ-81-BOMB-HI, February 1945, AFHRA*)

The B-25s used a wide variety of ordnance to attack Japanese troop concentrations, including demolition, fragmentation and incendiary bombs, and depth charges, which were effective in blowing away the jungle covering Japanese bunkers. A local innovation was a fuel bomb made from a 55-gallon oil drum filled with fuel oil, gasoline and an explosive device. The 12th BG dropped these fuel bombs in the Arakan in early 1945 (*3A-33923, RG342H, NARA*)

shattered Japanese divisions began their withdrawal toward Rangoon, with the Fourteenth Army in pursuit, knowing that the British and Indian divisions had to reach the Burmese capital before the beginning of the monsoon in early May. As the troops pushed south, the 12th BG's squadrons made repeated attacks on Japanese troop concentrations and stores. In a tactic more often associated with the fighter-bombers, the B-25s began working with the VCP teams near the frontlines, bombing and strafing targets just a quarter-of-a-mile from friendly troops, whose location would be marked with smoke shells.

To keep up with the advance, the 12th BG began sending several flights of B-25s to operate from the captured Japanese airfield at Meiktila, using the other squadrons to fly in bombs, ammunition and spare parts. The 82nd BS began flying missions out of Meiktila on 11 April, with four aircraft and crews flying three to four missions a day for a week, then rotating back as replacement crews came in. The 81st BS flew in to replace them nine days later, and stayed until the end of April. From Meiktila, the flight would head south to bomb Japanese troops and stores areas with 500-lb bombs and 55-gallon oil tank fuel bombs.

Towards the end of the month operational control over the 12th BG shifted to No 224 Group, RAF, in preparation for the final assault on Rangoon. That same month the 1st ACG's Night Intruder Section was disbanded and its aircraft flown back to USAAF depots in India.

British and Indian troops occupied Rangoon on 3 May to find the Japanese had evacuated the city. For the Tenth Air Force, the cessation of major combat in the NCAC and the capture of Rangoon ended its mission in Burma. In May most units began to withdraw to bases in India, while the USAAF high command started to make plans for transferring the Tenth Air Force to China, where it was to become a purely tactical air force supporting the Chinese armies. The 12th BG, however, continued flying combat missions for several more weeks as it aided the Fourteenth Army in its pursuit of the remnants of the Burma Area Army, which was now in full retreat in Thailand. The 12th sent the 83rd and 434th BSs to forward bases in Burma to be closer to the fighting, and despite the onset of the monsoon, both squadrons flew three or four missions a day.

The objectives were almost always concentrations of Japanese troops, sometimes in a wooded area or at the edge of a town or village. British and Indian units would provide the squadrons with coordinates for a suspected target, but often the bombers worked again with VCP teams. Initially, the squadrons would send out an element of three bombers, with the two wingmen dropping off the lead airplane. However, in order to achieve

greater accuracy, they switched to each bomber making an individual pass over the target area at 1000 ft. After bombing, the B-25s would come back in to strafe the area with their machine guns and 75 mm cannon.

The 81st and 82nd BSs were sent forward into southern Burma for a few days to relieve their sister squadrons before the forward operations ended on 24 May. These were probably the last B-25 combat missions flown over Burma.

Back in India, the squadrons returned to a normal routine of training while waiting for the planned move to China. In July, to the delight of the pilots, new A-26s Invaders began to arrive to replace the B-25s. The pilots found the A-26 to be a 'hot ship' – 'a pilot's dream ship', as one of them called it. Had the war lasted beyond August 1945, the 12th BG would have taken its new bombers to China to continue the fight against the Japanese.

The Tenth Air Force's medium bomber units contributed greatly to the isolation of the Burma battlefields and the weakening of the Burma Area Army – the twin goals of an interdiction campaign. From January 1944 to April 1945, the B-25 squadrons flew 15,492 sorties over Burma, dropping 15,797 tons of bombs – three-quarters of the amount dropped by the USAAF and RAF heavy bombers in the same period. The cost to the Tenth Air Force was 49 B-25s lost on operations, although only 27 aircraft were directly attributed to enemy action. As in China, weather and terrain could be just as deadly as anti-aircraft fire or fighters.

In July 1945 the 12th and 341st BGs began converting to the Douglas A-26 Invader. The 12th BG was the first to commence the conversion, and it then helped the 341st BG's squadrons with their transition. This A-26, assigned to the 434th BS, features the character 'Miss Lace' from Milton Caniff's cartoon strip *Mail Call*, popular with GIs around the world (*SQ-BOMB-434-HI, August 1945, AFHRA*)

Perhaps the greatest contribution the medium bombers made to victory was the destruction of Japanese railway bridges through their relentless attacks, which was made possible by the 490th BS's development of the 'Glip bombing' technique that would also be successful in China. The B-25s proved to be the most effective and economical aircraft for bridge-busting. This was important given the

LEFT
After the fall of Rangoon in May 1945, the 12th BG continued supporting the Fourteenth Army as it pursued Japanese formations retreating back to Thailand. The 83rd and 434th BSs operated out of the former RAF airfield at Magwe, with the air- and groundcrews living under tents next to the runways while their sister squadrons flew in supplies (*GP-12-HI (Bomb), May 1945, AFHRA*)

Japanese ability to undertake rapid repairs requiring key bridges to be bombed repeatedly. The destruction of bridges was the most critical component of the railway interdiction campaign, and it made attacks on marshalling yards, the destruction of locomotives and the bombing of storage depots and supply dumps that much more profitable.

FINAL MONTHS OF THE WAR IN CHINA

While the China Expeditionary Army had achieved the objectives of Operation *Ichi-Go*, there was still cause for apprehension despite the severe losses the Japanese had inflicted on the Chinese armies and the capture of the Fourteenth Air Force's bases in east China. Although the Fourteenth Air Force had indeed been pushed back, it had not been defeated and its combat power remained. While broadening the Japanese grasp on eastern China placed the IJA in a better position to resist a possible American invasion on the China coast, it now seemed more likely that US forces would opt for an assault closer to the home islands and then on Japan itself. Future operations by the IJA in China would be limited to smaller scale offensives, with the seizure of American airfields remaining a priority. The immediate need was to increase the flow of supplies to the Japanese armies in China by boosting traffic on the rail corridor from Peking to Hankow, and from Hankow south to Canton.

Taking stock of the situation in China, Chennault issued a new directive to his air commanders in January 1945. He now had four wings and one group of heavy bombers in the Fourteenth Air Force. The 69th CW was based in western China with four fighter squadrons and the 341st BG's three squadrons of B-25s. The 68th CW covered eastern China with three fighter squadrons and attached medium bombers from the 341st BG as needed. The CACW, with eight fighter squadrons and the four B-25 squadrons of the 1st BG, now had responsibility for central China and the area around the Yangtze River. With the planned departure of the B-29s from the theatre, the 312th Fighter Wing (FW), which had been charged with defending the bases from where the Superfortresses operated, was now free to take on offensive operations.

In early 1945 the Fourteenth Air Force began an interdiction campaign to deny the Japanese use of their newly captured railway corridor stretching from French Indochina north to Peking and beyond. The Fourteenth's fighter-bombers and medium bombers went after marshalling yards, bridges, tracks and trains whenever there was enough fuel to fly missions. When they found a train in daylight, the Mitchells dropped demolition and fragmentation bombs, before returning to strafe the train with machine guns and, in the case of the B-25H, cannon (*Courtesy Tony Strotman*)

Chennault's directive of 1 January 1945 put priority on the defence of the airfields in each wing's territory, support for Chinese ground forces and the destruction of Japanese shipping. Lower on the list of priorities was a general instruction to undertake operations 'against enemy forces as supplies and opportunity permit', but a covering letter sent with this directive stressed that attacks on the Japanese lines of communications, including railway

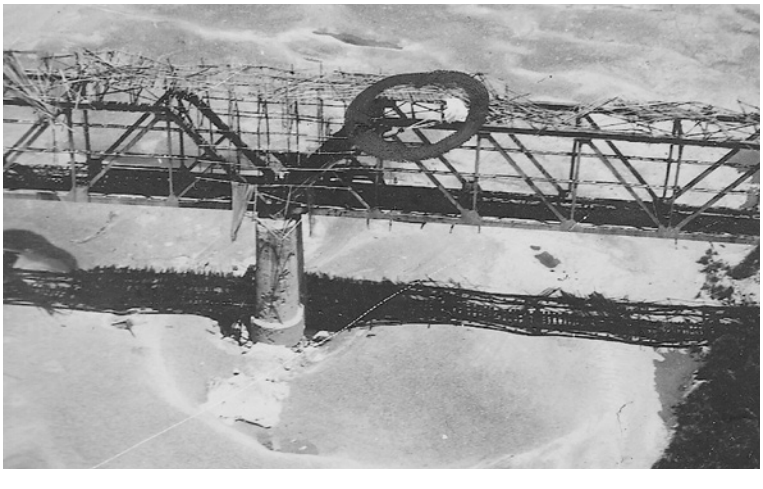
facilities and equipment and bridges, remained a continuing objective. In April the Fourteenth Air Force issued a second directive to the commanders of the 68th and 69th CWs, the CACW and the 312th FW with instructions to inflict maximum feasible interdiction of the Japanese railway system in their respective areas. The directive included a list of priority bridge targets for each wing. These directives formed the basis for an interdiction campaign against the Japanese railway system in China.

As previously noted, the main railway lines in China ran from Peking to Hankow, and from Hankow south to Canton, with a branch line running from Hengyang to Hanoi, in French Indochina. Other branch lines ran east and west off the main lines to connect with the ports on the China coast, and north to Manchuria and Korea. The railway interdiction campaign had three principal targets – railway facilities such as stations, marshalling yards, repair facilities and track; rolling stock and locomotives; and bridges along the railway system. As a post-war study of the campaign noted, attacks on these three types of targets were complementary, and the effect, as in Burma, was cumulative. Knocking out bridges put a temporary halt to traffic over the railway lines, leading to back-ups in the marshalling yards, which made them a more lucrative target. Although post-war it was found that destroying a locomotive was much more difficult than was appreciated at the time, any damage to a locomotive added to delays, taking it out of service and filling up the repair facilities, thus lengthening the time of repair and duly creating more bottlenecks.

During July 1945 the 4th BS experimented with parachute bombs against railway bridges and tracks. The parachutes were attached to M-57 250-lb demolition bombs with an eight- to 11-second delay fuse, dropped from 75 ft to 150 ft altitude (*SQ-BOMB-4-HI-XIV, June-July 1945, AFHRA*)

In this photograph one of the parachute bombs, with its 'chute deployed, can just be seen within the black circle before it hits the bridge. The 4th BS found that one of the benefits of using these para-demolition bombs was that they could be dropped at high speed, thus reducing an aeroplane's exposure to ground fire (*SQ-BOMB-4-HI-XIV, June-July 1945, AFHRA*)

The Fourteenth Air Force used all of its aircraft – heavy bombers, medium bombers and fighter-bombers – against marshalling yards. However, because the IJA became adept at effecting rapid repairs, and due to the limited number of aircraft available, the Fourteenth Air Force ordered attacks primarily when the yards had built up large quantities of rolling stock and locomotives on site. The B-25s took over breaking up railway tracks with spike bombs, 75 mm cannon and, later, parachute bombs dropped at low level.



Locomotives were always a prime target for the fighters and medium bombers. The B-25 squadrons developed a standard procedure for making sweeps of the lines in China and French Indochina. Following an attack on the primary target, usually a bridge, the Mitchells would split up into elements of two

aircraft, with each element assigned to cover a section of line, bombing and strafing any locomotives or rolling stock they could find. These daytime sweeps forced the Japanese to operate their locomotives at night only, and to camouflage them during the day, adding to the delays on the railway system. The 341st BG's squadrons began carrying one extra 500-lb bomb on their bridge-busting missions as a direct hit would destroy a locomotive during railway sweeps.

Attacks on bridges proved to be the most effective means of interdicting rail traffic and preventing movement along the line. The Fourteenth Air Force's fighter-bombers and medium bombers did most of the work knocking out bridges, with the 341st BG having responsibility for attacking such targets in French Indochina and in eastern China along the Hankow–Canton line. Missions were flown by detachments sent to forward airfields from the group's base at Yangkai. The CACW's medium bomber squadrons, meanwhile, went after bridges along the Peking–Hankow line.

As previously noted, the B-25 proved to be the most effective type of aeroplane for destroying bridges. Despite the increased danger, the Fourteenth Air Force mostly employed low-level attacks on bridges, as the meagre results obtained through medium altitude bombing simply did not justify the expenditure of precious fuel. Tactics depended in part on the structure of the bridge, the nature of the surrounding terrain and the strength of anti-aircraft fire. The 341st BG almost always employed the 'Glip bombing' technique that the 490th BS had perfected, squadrons sending out their B-25s armed with two 1000-lb bombs to make two passes on a bridge – each aircraft in a flight bombed individually. In central China the 1st BG used various techniques against bridges.

The campaign against railway bridges began to intensify during the fourth quarter of 1944 and rapidly accelerated during the first three months of 1945. By the end of March 1945, the medium bombers had destroyed or severely damaged 55 bridges and damaged a further 47, with most of the destruction achieved during the first quarter of 1945. Losses followed a similar pattern. During 1944 the 1st and the 341st BGs suffered only two B-25 losses between them while attacking bridges, but during the first three months of 1945 they lost seven aircraft.

From January through to the end of March 1945, the medium bomber groups primarily focused on destroying bridges in French Indochina so as to limit the IJA's ability to move troops or supplies into southern China. During January, with the 11th BS conducting sea sweeps from Suichwan, in eastern China, and the 22nd BS supporting the Salween campaign, the bridge-busting mission fell to the 491st BS. The squadron flew ten missions against bridge targets, combining these attacks with sweeps of the railway lines and marshalling yards in the area, knocking out or damaging several bridges. The railway sweeps also proved profitable, with crews submitting claims for 15 locomotives destroyed or damaged, as well as rolling stock and rail facilities hit.

The squadron in turn lost two aircraft, one simply failing to return from a mission in bad weather. On 19 January, 1Lt Kenneth Bridges had completed his run on a bridge 25 miles northeast of Hanoi and was turning away when anti-aircraft fire knocked out his right engine. Climbing to

altitude, he headed back in the direction of China on one engine. Just after crossing the Chinese border the left engine also began to cut out. Bridges ordered his crew to bail out, but moments later his B-25 descended into a valley and exploded before he himself could jump.

February brought the bad weather common to the region, limiting missions to five days at the end of the month. The 491st had a red letter day on 27 February, destroying four bridges in French Indochina and damaging two more to receive a commendation from Chennault. In early March the 22nd BS joined the 491st BS in bombing bridges in French Indochina, the two squadrons claiming four destroyed or rendered unserviceable on 5 March, although the 491st also lost an aircraft.

By the end of March, the destruction of bridges had made it impossible for trains to run from Saigon to Hanoi and beyond. From December 1944 to March 1945, the B-25s had destroyed 24 major bridges and damaged a further 17 using 'Glip bombing'. In August 1945 the 341st BG received a DUC for its bridge-busting campaign in French Indochina.

The B-25s repeatedly hit railway bridges throughout China and French Indochina to keep them unserviceable. Having a bridge out for even a few days would disrupt transportation over the line. The 491st BS went after the bridge at Puchi on 31 March 1945. Note the bomb craters in the foreground from previous attacks (*3A-2702, RG342H, NARA*)

In central China, bad weather and a shortage of fuel limited the number of missions flown by the 1st BG's squadrons for much of January. Small detachments from the 3rd and 4th BSs, flying from the airfield at Chihkiang, west of Hengyang, flew night harassment missions over the roads in central China searching for convoys. Although the weather continued to be poor in February, the squadrons contributed to the railway interdiction effort with several joint attacks on marshalling yards and repair facilities. Toward the end of the month the 1st BS sent a small detachment of B-25Hs to the airfield at Hsian to carry out an experiment that saw the aircraft using their 75 mm cannon to destroy railway tracks. The 'Invader Detachment', as it was called, flew missions for a month. Crews found that the 75 mm shells could damage the roadbed of a railway line, but that they needed to hit close to the tracks themselves if they were to damage them. Bombing proved to be more effective, but these low-level missions were costly. The 'Invader Detachment' lost two aircraft during its month of operations, with the 1st BS losing two more on other regular missions.

Prior to bad weather bringing operations to a halt in the middle of the month, the other 1st BG squadrons added their efforts to the interdiction campaign by going after railway bridges and marshalling yards and destroying sections of track. The 4th BS also tried using the 75 mm cannon against railway tracks, but like the 1st BS, it found that anything less than a direct hit would only damage the roadbed.

Two Japanese offensives against the American airfields caused a diversion away from railway interdiction. On 21 March, the IJA in central China began a push to capture the airfield at Laohokow, a forward base for the CACW, and the airfields beyond. Laohokow had to be evacuated on 25 March. The CACW B-25 squadrons immediately started attacking the Japanese columns and supply dumps by day and night, the 1st and

2nd BSs flying more than 40 missions each during the last ten days of March. On most of these missions only one or two aircraft would go out to sweep a section of road or river, or to attack Japanese troops in towns and villages along the advance.

On 10 April the IJA began a second offensive aimed at the airfield at Chihkiang, west of Hengyang. The loss of this base would have opened up the approaches to Kunming and Chungking. The Chinese resisted fiercely, bringing forward troops the Americans had trained and equipped and slowing the Japanese advance before it could reach Chihkiang.

In April and May the 3rd and 4th BSs provided air support to the Chinese divisions and made repeated attacks on the Peking–Hankow railway line and its key bridges and marshalling yards. The squadrons made regular attacks on the line, breaking sections of tracks with demolition bombs and spike bombs. To the north, the 1st and 2nd BSs carried out similar missions. During May the 2nd BS tried a new method of attacking bridges. The squadron armaments staff worked out a way of fitting five 1000-lb bombs into the bomb-bay of a B-25J and four into the bomb-bay of a B-25H. At the bridge target the Mitchells would make individual bomb runs from 6000 ft. On the first attempt (a joint mission with two aircraft from the 3rd BS), the B-25s achieved direct hits, destroying the bridge, but on subsequent missions the results were less conclusive. The combination of relentless air attacks and stiff resistance brought both Japanese offensives to a halt and forced the IJA into retreat in early June.

During the spring months, poor weather and a shortage of fuel limited operations for the 341st BG in China. While more supplies were coming over the 'Hump', the need to supply the Chinese armies resisting the IJA's advances in central China restricted the amount of fuel available for the Fourteenth Air Force. Nevertheless, the 11th and 22nd BSs sent detachments from Yangkai to newly completed airfields at Lachwanping and Chihkiang, as well as to Laohokow before it was evacuated. Most of the missions flown from these bases were in support of Chinese ground forces, conducting rail and road sweeps and bombing marshalling yards supplying the Japanese divisions. During March the 22nd BS lost two aeroplanes operating with these forward detachments.

April and May were slow months, the 11th BS flying no missions after the 17th, the 22nd BS managing only six missions during the month and five more in May, and the 491st BS flying just six missions in April and a similar number in May. Despite this low activity, the 22nd still lost two aircraft and the 491st one during May.

A B-25 drops six spike bombs on a section of track in China. The silhouette of the bomber can be seen just ahead of the bombs. Some of the B-25 squadrons tried breaking up railway tracks using the 75 mm cannon on their B-25Hs, but they found that only a direct hit would damage the line (*3A-2804, RG342H, NARA*)

In April the 490th BS finally re-joined its parent group, transferring from Burma to China, although soon after its arrival the unit headed north to the airfield at Hanchung and came under the operational control of the 312th FW. From Hanchung, the 490th sent four bombers to work with the 311th FG at Hsian, destroying two bridges on their first mission. Not to be outdone, on the squadron's first mission from Hanchung three B-25s destroyed their assigned bridge target. The 490th also had an active time in May, bombing 24 bridges and destroying or damaging 101 spans using their 'Glip bombing' technique. The squadron lost one B-25J on a bridge mission on 10 May when ground fire hit its right engine. As the bomber headed back to Hsian, a fire developed in the engine and it exploded, taking off the right wing. The crew had no chance to bail out. A second J-model went down at the end of the month while strafing a railway station. Although the other crews saw no ground fire, the B-25, a veteran of 116 missions over Burma, pulled up after its run and then flew straight into the ground.

The final two-and-a-half months of the war in China saw a decline in activity for the 341st BG. In June and July 1945, the 490th BS flew most of the group's missions, continuing to knock out bridges and bomb marshalling yards in northern China from Hanchung and Hsian. During June the 490th destroyed or severely damaged a further nine bridges, getting more in July despite bad weather limiting the squadron to only 15 missions. The 490th flew its last combat mission – its 615th since 18 February 1943 – on 20 July, and, appropriately, destroyed the squadron's last bridge, bringing its total to 192 in Burma and China. The 341st BG's remaining squadrons flew ten missions in June and 20 in July, mostly to targets in French Indochina. All four squadrons had by then begun the transition to the A-26 Invader, sending air- and groundcrews to India for conversion training with the 12th BG.

Tragedy hit the 11th BS on the 20 June mission to bomb a bridge at Quang Tri, in French Indochina. 1Lt Fred Carey was the last of four aircraft to attack the bridge, and as he levelled off from his 'Glip bombing' run, his B-25 was seen to wobble slightly. When the aeroplane passed over the bridge it flipped onto its back and did a 'split-s' directly into the bank beyond the bridge. With its bombs still on board, the B-25 blew up in a tremendous explosion, killing Carey and his crew, which included 1Lt James Carey, his co-pilot and brother. The two Carey brothers had flown together in the 11th BS without incident since October 1944, only

The 491st BS continued flying missions to French Indochina to keep the railway line leading into China out of service. Flying from Yangkai airfield, the squadron's B-25s went after bridges, and having dropped their bombs on such a target, they would follow the line looking for locomotives and rolling stock to strafe. By the end of March 1945 the 341st BG had destroyed 24 bridges (*Courtesy Tony Strotman*)

In April 1945 the 490th BS transferred to China to re-join the 341st BG after more than a year of operating on its own over Burma. Despite having technically returned to its parent group, the squadron still flew on its own under the control of the 312th FW. The name *BURMA MAIL* on this B-25H refers to the leaflet dropping missions the squadron flew before it left Burma for China (*SQ-490-BOMB-HI, May 1945, AFHRA*)

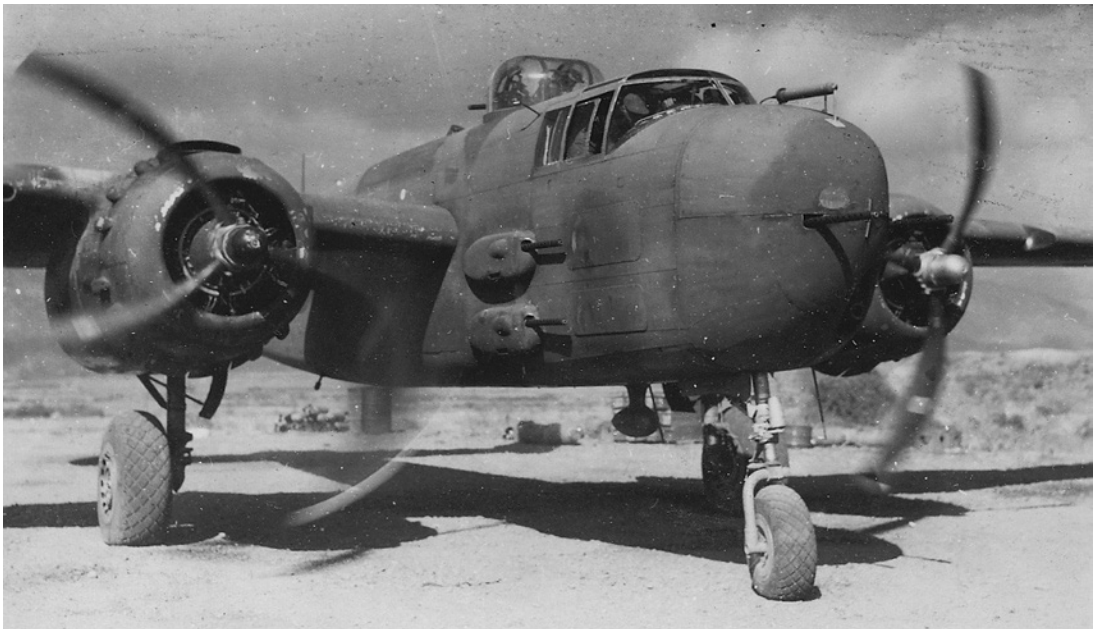
to be killed near the very end of the campaign.

By this point in the war the China Expeditionary Army had begun withdrawing its forces from southern China and sending them north to regroup closer to Manchuria and the Japanese home islands, partly due to a shortage of supplies caused by the railway interdiction campaign. By the end of July Chinese forces had re-captured Liuchow and were on the outskirts of Kweilin. Throughout June and July the fighter-bombers and medium bombers of the CACW had continued to attack rail traffic in north-central China along the Peking–Hankow line, as well as on the line to the south.

Although a lack of fuel limited the medium bombers to less than 12 missions a month, the B-25s bombed the marshalling yards, attack bridges and destroy sections of track whenever they could. In one mission on 20 July against the marshalling yards at Sinsiang, the 1st BS found no fewer than 41 locomotives and 208 goods wagons in the target area – likely a back-up resulting from breaks along the line. Ten aircraft bombed the yards with great accuracy, post-mission photographic reconnaissance revealing that 13 locomotives and 24 goods wagons had been severely damaged.

The fuel situation for the 4th BS improved during July, allowing the unit to carry out 55 night harassment missions against convoys of Japanese troops travelling north to Hankow. The unit was supported in its endeavours by the fuel-starved 2nd and 3rd BSs, which sent aircraft and crews to fly with the 4th instead. The squadron would send out several aircraft a night, at staggered intervals, to cover sections of the roads. B-25 crews found convoys nearly every night, attacking 98 of them in total during the month with clusters of fragmentation and incendiary bombs at low altitude. While it was difficult to determine the results of such attacks, the crews were often rewarded with the sight of a secondary explosion or flames coming from a truck hit during the attack. The 4th BS lost two B-25s in July while flying these missions.

In the final weeks of the war the squadrons tried out several new tactics to counter Japanese anti-aircraft fire. For some time the B-25 units had had their escorting fighters go in to strafe anti-aircraft positions before the bombers began their runs. For attacks on bridges during June, the 3rd BS had two Mitchells strafe flak batteries and drop fragmentation bombs on them from low level, immediately after which the remaining B-25s would bomb the bridge. On one of its final missions, to bomb the marshalling



The 11th BS operated a number of B-25Hs equipped with the AN/APG-13A radar set, mounted just ahead of the windscreen. The radar set, operated by the navigator, provided ranging data to allow for more accuracy with the 75 mm cannon. This radar-equipped B-25H was fitted with just two of the standard four nose machine guns (*SQ-11-BOMB-HI, June 1945, AFHRA*)

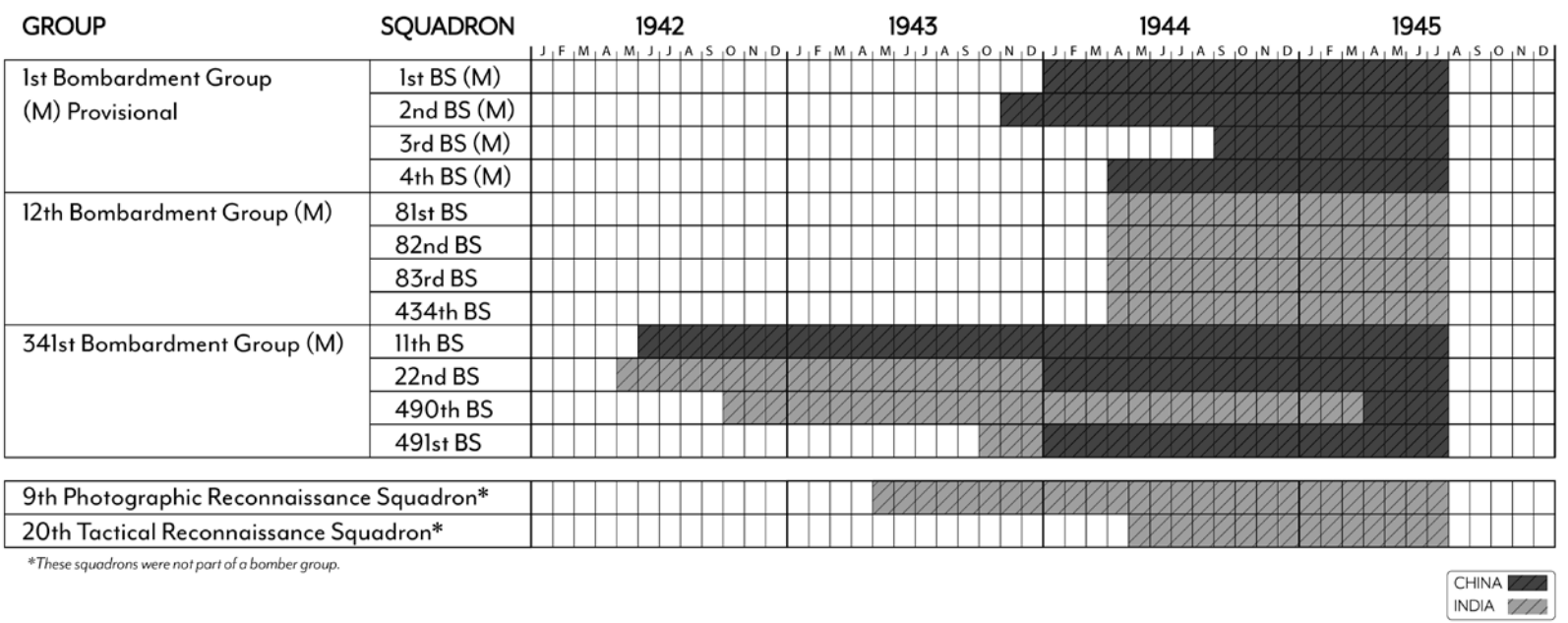
yards at Suchow, the 1st BS resorted to having two B-25s fly over the target just ahead of the main formation, dropping 500-lb bombs set to burst above the ground. Photographic reconnaissance had shown that the Japanese had moved in several heavy anti-aircraft guns to defend the yards, but the air-burst bombs had wiped out the gun emplacements, enabling the remaining B-25s to make their runs without harm.

The CACW B-25 squadrons flew the final Mitchell bombing missions of the war in China on 10 August, appropriately targeting a marshalling yard during daylight hours and convoys in a night harassment sortie. The B-25's service in China in World War 2 ended a little over three years after the aircraft's first mission on 3 June 1942.

The Fourteenth Air Force's interdiction campaign against the Japanese-controlled railway system in China was a success. The system had the capacity of moving some 41,000,000 tons of supplies a year. By the middle of 1945 this capacity had been reduced to 31,000,000 tons, and it was continuing to decline under the cumulative impact of the campaign. Shortages of supplies were particularly acute for enemy units operating south of Hankow, IJA forces in this region requiring 50,000 tons of supplies a month at a minimum. By the spring of 1945 the disruption of the railway lines and river traffic along the Yangtze had reduced this figure to less than 25,000 tons a month.

Post-war interviews with IJA officers revealed the extent of the damage to the railway system – significant disruption of through trains along the line, bridges out for extended periods, declining efficiency all along the railway system, 39 per cent of the locomotives in northern China non-operational, and repair facilities reduced to a quarter of their normal capacity. While the Fourteenth Air Force's fighter-bomber units flew the greatest number of sorties against the railway system, the role played by the B-25 crews was critical to the campaign's success.

UNIT ASSIGNMENTS


GROUP
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2nd BS (M)
3rd BS (M)
4th BS (M)
12th Bombardment Group (M)
81st BS
82nd BS
83rd BS
434th BS
341st Bombardment Group (M)
11th BS
22nd BS
490th BS
491st BS
9th Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron*
20th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron*
CHINA
INDIA

*These squadrons were not part of a bomber group.

APPENDICES

B-25 UNITS OF THE CBI

Tenth Air Force

341st Bombardment Group (Medium)
- 11th Bombardment Squadron (Medium)
- 22nd Bombardment Squadron (Medium)
- 490th Bombardment Squadron (Medium)
- 491st Bombardment Squadron (Medium)

12th Bombardment Group (Medium)
- 81st Bombardment Squadron (Medium)
- 82nd Bombardment Squadron (Medium)
- 83rd Bombardment Squadron (Medium)
- 434th Bombardment Squadron (Medium)

9th Photographic Reconnaissance Squadron

20th Tactical Reconnaissance Squadron

Fourteenth Air Force

341st Bombardment Group (Medium)
- 11th Bombardment Squadron (Medium)
- 22nd Bombardment Squadron (Medium)
- 490th Bombardment Squadron (Medium)
- 491st Bombardment Squadron (Medium)

1st Bombardment Group (Medium) Provisional
- 1st Bombardment Squadron (Medium) Provisional
- 2nd Bombardment Squadron (Medium) Provisional
- 3rd Bombardment Squadron (Medium) Provisional
- 4th Bombardment Squadron (Medium) Provisional

COLOUR PLATES

1
B-25C (serial unknown) of the 11th BS/341st BG, Kunming, China, circa February 1943

This B-25C began flying missions with the 11th BS from Kunming in October 1942. Photographs from the period show that shortly after arriving in China, the 11th BS's B-25s had their USAAF serial numbers removed from their position on the rudder, leaving only an aeroplane identification number. This practice of removing the serial numbers from B-25s in China continued, to varying degrees, through to war's end. The 11th BS painted its squadron insignia, the cartoon character 'Mr Jiggs' holding a bomb, on the nose of all of its aircraft. This insignia dates back to the squadron's service flying DH-4 bombers in World War 1. When new B-25Ds arrived in-theatre for the 11th over the summer of 1943, *GOPHER* was transferred to Karachi, India, where it served for a time with the bomb squadrons of the CACW.

2
B-25J 43-3949 of the 11th BS/341st BG, Yangkai, China, late 1944

The 11th BS received its first B-25J in April 1944, and *Hustle'n Hazel* was a long-serving J-model that was one of six such aircraft assigned to the squadron during the following month. By late October *Hustle'n Hazel* had completed 92 missions and was still flying with its original engines. The aeroplane was lost, possibly in an accident, on 16 June 1945. As can be seen, the bomber's individual aircraft number bore no correlation with its USAAF serial number, making it difficult for historians to identify many of the aircraft flown by the 11th BS.

3
B-25J 44-29146 of the 11th BS/341st BG, Yangkai, China, 1945

This solid nose B-25J was assigned to the 11th BS in January 1945, and it served with the squadron until war's end. With the arrival of the 22nd and 491st BSs in China in January 1944, the Fourteenth Air Force began numbering its B-25s in the 400 series – the 11th BS had aeroplane numbers in the low 400s. Remaining in China after the war ended, *HOOTEM SHOOTEM CHARLIE JOHN*, complete with a locomotive and goods wagons in silhouette, was transferred to the ROCAF in April 1946.

4
B-25H (serial unknown) of the 22nd BS/341st BG, Kunming, China, circa September 1944

After transferring to China and the Fourteenth Air Force in January 1944, the 22nd BS began receiving new B-25Hs to supplement its older B-25C/Ds. The sharksmouth design that the AVG had made famous in China became a popular decoration for many Fourteenth Air Force bomber and fighter aircraft. The sharksmouth fitted particularly well around the shorter nose of the B-25H, as illustrated here. Like other B-25 squadrons in the CBI, the 22nd marked its aircraft with its unit insignia just forward of the cockpit. Note also how the aircraft's serial number on the tail has been crudely painted over, making it all but impossible to ascertain *MARION*'s identity.

5
B-25J (serial unknown) of the 22nd BS/341st BG, Kunming, China, late 1944

The 22nd BS also began receiving B-25Js in April 1944, the bombers having their serial numbers painted over on the tail and replaced with an aircraft number in the 400 series. The 22nd BS appears to have been allocated numbers in the 420s to low 430s range. The *OK* titling on the nose of this otherwise anonymous J-model may have been the aircraft's name.

6
B-25J 43-27810 of the 490th BS/341st BG, Yangkai, China, circa 1945

This B-25J was a 490th BS veteran of the air war over Burma, with markings for 116 missions completed – it is also believed to have destroyed eight bridges. When the 490th BS arrived in China, the squadron apparently followed Fourteenth Air Force practice and

painted over the aircraft serial numbers on the tails of its B-25s, leaving only the last three digits visible. The significance of the letter A on the tail of this Mitchell is unknown. This aircraft was lost on 30 May 1945 when the pilot went down to strafe rolling stock in a marshalling yard in China and crashed into the ground, the bomber exploding shortly thereafter. Fellow pilots saw no anti-aircraft fire or damage inflicted on the aeroplane prior to it crashing.

7
B-25G 42-64768 of the 490th BS/341st BG, Yangkai, China, summer 1945

This aeroplane was a long-serving veteran of the 490th BS. Converted from a B-25C into a G-model, it joined the 490th BS in October 1943. In the night attack on the Sittang bridge on 8 April 1944, the Mitchell lost four feet from its left wing when the pilot hit a pagoda pulling up from his bomb run. In September 1944, after completing 102 combat missions totalling 742 flying hours, 42-64768 was retired from operational flying and converted into a squadron hack, transporting supplies and crews between bases in India. Later, the squadron added the large skull and wings on the nose as illustrated here. The aeroplane went to China with the 490th BS in April 1945, and on 2 July it was flying a crew to an advanced base at Sian when its undercarriage could not be lowered upon arriving at its destination. Returning to the 490th BS's forward base at Hanchung, unit CO Capt Edward Tengler circled the field to allow seven members of the crew to bail out, before he then made a successful crash-landing. The damage inflicted on the Mitchell was too much to repair and the veteran bomber was salvaged for parts.

8
B-25H (serial unknown) of the 491st BS/341st BG, Kunming, China, late 1944

The 491st BS began receiving new B-25Hs in February 1944 after transferring to the Fourteenth Air Force. This aeroplane has been adorned with the 491st FS's later insignia – a horseshoe hitting a stake (called a 'ringer' in the game of horseshoes) – beneath the cockpit as was common to CBI B-25 units. The 491st adopted the nickname of the 'Ringer Squadron' as the unit always hit its objectives. *Chattanooga Choo Choo* flew more than 50 missions over Burma and China and claimed two Japanese aircraft shot down, as well as two Chinese junks sunk.

9
B-25J (serial unknown) of the 491st BS/341st BG, Kunming, China, late 1944

After receiving H-models, the 491st BS was also issued with B-25Js to replace its older B-25C/Ds, although the D-models continued to fly missions for the rest of 1944 and at least one B-25D remained on operations as late as June 1945. The 491st BS aircraft appear to have been numbered in the mid-430s to mid-440s. On its starboard side, 439 bore the name *Niagara's Belle* beneath the cockpit. The number '439' on the nose was outlined in black on both the port and starboard sides of the bomber.

10
B-25H (serial unknown) of the 491st BS/341st BG, Kunming, China, late 1944

This 491st BS B-25H carried another variation of the sharksmouth design on its nose. With more replacement aircraft available, by the end of 1944 most of the D-models had been withdrawn from the China-based B-25 squadrons. The units usually had between 12 and 16 aeroplanes on strength, with a ratio of roughly 60 per cent B-25Js to 40 per cent B-25Hs, although the numbers varied with the flow of replacements, losses in combat and the movement of aeroplanes out of the units for servicing.

11
B-25J 44-28848 of the 1st BS/1st BG, CACW, Chihkiang, China, April 1945

This B-25J was the aircraft assigned to Maj Raymond Hodges, CO of the 1st BS in the CACW's 1st BG, in the spring of 1945. Arriving in China in March of that year, the aeroplane's first mission was a night incendiary attack, after which the crew decided to name the bomber *FIREBUG*. In contrast to Fourteenth Air Force practice, the Mitchell retained its USAAF serial number, in addition to the aircraft number 621 that indicated its assignment to the 1st BS. Nor did bombers from the CACW carry squadron insignia on their noses, as did aircraft from other B-25 units in the CBI. On a mission in May 1945, Japanese anti-aircraft fire damaged 44-28848's undercarriage so that it could not be fully extended. Maj Hodges made a safe landing with the gear only partially extended, although the B-25 was so badly damaged in the process that it had to be scrapped for parts.

12
B-25J 44-31132 of the 1st BS/1st BG, CACW, Chihkiang, China, May 1945

During the last few months of the war the 1st BS flew a mix of H- and J-model Mitchells, all in natural metal and most seemingly devoid of markings except the USAAF serial number and an aircraft number on the tail in the 600 series. The ROCAF insignia was painted on the top and bottom of each wing and on the fuselage sides, but no blue and white stripes were added to the rudders as was the case with other Nationalist Chinese aircraft. 44-31132 was delivered to the USAAF in April 1945 and it joined the 1st BS the following month, flying missions until war's end.

13
B-25D (serial unknown) of the 2nd BS/1st BG, CACW, Kweilin, China, November 1943

The 2nd BS commenced operations in November 1943 with B-25Ds supplied under Lend-Lease. After arriving in China, these aircraft had their American star and bar insignias on the fuselage and wings painted over and replaced with the ROCAF insignia on the top and bottom of each wing and on the fuselage sides. Blue and white stripes were also painted on the rudders. Finally, each aeroplane carried an ROCAF serial number in yellow on the fin. In January 1944 the squadron began assigning aircraft numbers in the low 600s to its B-25Ds and newly arrived B-25Hs.

14
B-25H possibly 43-4116 of the 3rd BS/1st BG, CACW, Chihkiang, China, spring 1945

This B-25H may have been one of a batch of ten aircraft given to China under Lend-Lease, the aeroplane carrying the standard ROCAF markings. The 3rd BS applied aircraft numbers in the 700 series on both the nose and tail of its aircraft. In 1945 the squadron aircraft numbers ranged from 715 to 726. It appears the 3rd BS left off any USAAF or ROCAF serial numbers, thus conforming

to Fourteenth Air Force practice. Like other CBI B-25 units, the 3rd painted its insignia on the nose of the aircraft. The squadron adopted a skunk as its insignia, and the American pilots assigned to the 3rd sometimes referred to themselves as the 'Spray and Pray' unit after the skunk's common defence against predators.

15
B-25H possibly 43-4976 of the 4th BS/1st BG, CACW, Kweilin, China, August 1944

A B-25H with this aircraft number was assigned to the 4th BS in August 1944, the bomber being damaged on 2 September in an attack on the former Fourteenth Air Force airfield at Hengyang, which had been abandoned during the Japanese *Ichi-Go* offensive. After being repaired, the aircraft returned to combat and was still flying missions as of March 1945. The 4th BS used aircraft numbers in the low 700 series ranging from 700 to 710, and it also flew several B-25s marked in the 600 series, possibly borrowed or assigned from other squadrons. This Mitchell, christened *MARIE*, bore the squadron insignia on its nose, but neither USAAF nor ROCAF serial numbers.

16
B-25C 41-13121 of the 22nd BS/341st BG, Kurmitola, India, late 1943

This aircraft was one of the early B-25Ds assigned to the 22nd BS in the latter part of 1942, having flown across the Atlantic and Africa to India. The squadrons of the 341st BG had plain markings – national insignia, the aircraft's serial number on the tail and an individual aeroplane plane number on the nose from the last two digits of the serial number – and few B-25s displayed elaborate artwork. The squadrons identified their aircraft by painting unit insignia on the noses of their Mitchells, as seen here. The 22nd BS's first insignia featured an eagle dropping bombs over a snow-covered mountain range. Later in the war the unit changed its insignia to an aggressive-looking bulldog. 41-13121 survived its time in the frontline to be flown back to the USA, whereupon it was transferred to the Reconstruction Finance Corporation (RFC) and disposed of as scrap in November 1945.

17
B-25C 41-13122 of the 490th BS/341st BG, Kurmitola, India, late 1943

The next aircraft to roll off the North American production line after 41-13121 (seen in the previous profile) went to the 490th BS. Like its sister squadron, the 490th only applied national markings and the squadron's insignia (a skull and pilot's wings) to its aircraft, along with a bomb tally. The squadron commander, Maj James Philpott, had flown 41-13122 until he was replaced in May 1943, and it may have been him who named it *NOBODY'S DARLING* – the nickname was applied in modest-sized lettering beneath the 490th BS insignia. After completing 122 missions, destroying five bridges and claiming two Japanese fighters destroyed, the bomber was renamed *Flagship of the Skull and Wings* and returned to the USA, with its route from India painted on the left side of the fuselage. It was subsequently turned over to the RFC for disposal in July 1945.

18
B-25D 41-29899 of the 490th BS/341st BG, Kurmitola, India, late 1943

Although this plainly marked B-25D carried three victory symbols for Japanese aircraft its gunners had been credited with shooting down, it lacked any mission symbols. The aerial victories may have been claimed during the combats of 13 and 21 May 1943, when the 490th BS endured repeated attacks from IJAAF aircraft. In these combats the squadron claimed seven fighters destroyed, five probably destroyed and nine damaged for the loss of two B-25s. This aeroplane continued flying with the 490th until it was written off at Barrackpore airfield, in India, on 20 August 1944.

19
B-25H 43-4411 of the 490th BS/341st BG, Yangkai, China, spring 1945

This veteran B-25H completed a remarkable 165 missions, which was surely one of the highest tallied for any Mitchell in the CBI. In addition, the crews flying this aeroplane claimed 20 bridges destroyed in Burma. Delivered to the USAAF in January 1944 and sent to China a month later, the aircraft was initially assigned to the Fourteenth Air Force. Reassigned to the Tenth Air Force at the end of February 1944, it was salvaged in India at the end of 1945.

20
B-25C/D (serial unknown) of the 491st BS/341st BG, Chakulia, India, early 1943

During its first year in combat the 491st BS adorned its B-25C/Ds with this early version of the unit's insignia known as the 'Bomb Jockey', which featured a winged pilot figure, cigar clenched in his mouth, carrying a wooden club and riding a bomb. The squadron took this as its nickname, aircrew referring to themselves as the 'Bomb Jockeys'. Like the other 341st BG squadrons, the 491st BS's aircraft carried only the national insignia, the squadron insignia on the nose and the aeroplane's serial number on the tail. Its B-25C/Ds do not seem to have carried individual aircraft numbers.

21
B-25C 42-32266 of the 491st BS/341st BG, Kurmitola, India, late 1943

Sometime in September or early October 1943, the 491st BS adopted a new insignia and nickname. The former featured a horseshoe hitting a stake atop a globe, which inspired the latter – the 'Ringer Squadron'. Initially, the squadron painted just its new insignia on the nose of its B-25s, but after moving to China and the Fourteenth Air Force in early 1944, the unit added the words *RINGER SQUADRON* under the insignia as shown in profiles eight and nine. This particular aeroplane came to grief in a crash-landing in India in late 1943.

22
B-25H 43-4208 of the 82nd BS/12th BG, Tejgaon, India, spring 1944

This aircraft was delivered to the USAAF on 8 October 1943 and was assigned to the Tenth Air Force in India on 15 February 1944, where it joined the 12th BG. In August the aeroplane was transferred to the Fourteenth Air Force, and it was written off in a crash in March 1945. Many of the 12th BG's B-25s featured elaborate nose art, particularly those of the 82nd BS. The squadron's B-25Hs also had a fierce sharksmouth and eyes painted around the nose in addition to the unique nose art beneath the cockpit.

23
B-25H 43-4381 of the 82nd BS/12th BG, Tejgaon, India, spring 1944

Capt Norman L Harms, a bombardier in the 82nd BS, painted a

number of B-25s with a series of dog and puppy cartoon characters inspired by the squadron's bulldog insignia. *DOG DAIZE* was one in this series, which included *BAM'S MAM*, *PROBLEM CHILD*, *PROP WASH*, *MILK RUN* and *PINUP GIRL*. Harms also painted a number of scantily clad young ladies on several of the squadron's B-25s. This H-model was delivered to the USAAF on 14 December 1943 and sent to India on 3 February 1944. Initially assigned to the Fourteenth Air Force, it was transferred back to the Tenth Air Force in April 1944 and salvaged at the end of 1945.

24

B-25H 43-4909 of the 82nd BS/12th BG, Fenny, India, autumn 1944

EATIN' KITTY was another example of Harms' artistic talents. The 82nd BS had aircraft numbers in the 26 to 50 range, with the 81st BS having 1 to 25, the 83rd BS 51 to 75 and the 434th BS 76 to 99. This B-25H was delivered to the USAAF on 31 May 1944 and departed the USA for India 23 days later, where it was assigned to the Tenth Air Force and allocated to the 12th BG. The bomber was apparently salvaged in November 1945.

25

B-25J-1 43-27498 of the 82nd BS/12th BG, Fenny, India, spring 1945

Employees at the Oak Ridge plant in Tennessee (part of the Manhattan Project) donated two Sunday paychecks to raise $250,000 to purchase a new B-25 bomber for the USAAF. A group of them christened B-25J 43-27498 on 18 March 1945 at the Knoxville, Tennessee, municipal airport. They named the bomber *SUNDAY PUNCH* for their Sunday punch card paychecks and the B-25J's formidable armament of 12 forward-firing machine guns. On arrival in India, this aircraft was assigned to the 82nd BS, where the figure of the reclining young woman was added under the *SUNDAY PUNCH* nickname. When he learned of the connection with his home state, squadron pilot 1Lt Tom Evans, a resident of Knoxville, Tennessee, asked to be assigned to the aeroplane and ended up flying 14 of the 28 missions completed by the bomber before war's end.

26

B-25H 43-4357 of the 82nd BS/12th BG, Fenny, India, autumn 1944

This aircraft was also assigned to 12th BG's 82nd BS in India, although the serial number depicted here may not be accurate. Indeed, the Aircraft Record Card for this particular serial number shows a B-25H that served with the Fifth Air Force, not the Tenth Air Force.

27

B-25J 43-3951 of the 83rd BS/12th BG, Pandaveswar, India, June 1944

The 12th BG's other squadrons did not have as elaborate markings as the 82nd BS, but many did have names or nose art, including 43-3951 *CORNHUSKER*, which is the nickname for the state of Nebraska and its residents, so it is likely that someone from this crew came from the state. The aeroplane was delivered in February 1944 and assigned to the Tenth Air Force three months later. It lost an engine to Japanese fighters over Myitkyina on 9 July 1944, although the pilot made a successful crash-landing in marsh land near the town. The crew walked to the airfield at Myitkyina and were returned to the 83rd BS ten days later.

28

B-25H 43-4271 of the Bomber Section/1st ACG, Shailakandi, India, April 1944

This aeroplane participated in Operation *Thursday* (the second Chindit expedition, in early March 1944) as one of 12 B-25Hs assigned to the Bomber Section of the 1st ACG. The aircraft boasted the unit's distinctive marking of five white stripes on the rear fuselage, signifying the 1st ACG's five sections. Initially just nicknamed *Dolly*, the bomber was subsequently adorned with the figure of popular American cartoon character *Bugs Bunny* leaning against a cannon that was aligned with the 75 mm cannon housed within the nose of the aircraft. *Dolly* had completed at least 38 missions by the time the 1st ACG was withdrawn from operations. After the Bomber Section disbanded in May 1944, the B-25 was apparently transferred to the Fourteenth Air Force.

29

B-25H 43-4935 of the Bomber/Night Intruder Section/1st ACG, Asansol, India, July 1944

Unlike the other sections in the 1st ACG, the Bomber Section was not re-organised as a separate squadron in the summer of 1944, but became the Bomber/Night Intruder Section tasked with carrying out nocturnal intruder sorties over Burma. Surprisingly, the Night Intruder Section's new B-25H aircraft retained their all-metal finish, which must have made them quite visible on the moonlight nights when they carried out operations. The H-models also retained the Air Commando stripes and the aeroplane's serial number on the tail, but no other markings. 43-4935 was delivered to the USAAF in June 1944 and departed for India later that month. Initially assigned to the Fourteenth Air Force, it was transferred to the Tenth Air Force in August 1944.

30

B-25D 41-3036 of the 9th PRS/8th PRG, Dinjan, India, spring 1944

The 9th PRS obtained some war-weary B-25s retired from bomber squadrons to supplement its F-4 reconnaissance aeroplanes. Stripped of armament, except for one machine gun in the nose, these Mitchells carried the squadron insignia under the cockpit and the aircraft serial number on the tail, but no other markings. The unit mounted cameras on the port and starboard sides of the rear section of the fuselage. One of the squadron's aircraft, nicknamed *Shutterbug*, completed 70 combat missions with one of the 341st BG's squadrons and then undertook 78 reconnaissance flights prior to being retired in July 1944. This B-25D was assigned to the Fourteenth Air Force in June 1943 and then transferred to the Tenth Air Force at the end of March 1944. It served with the latter organisation until November 1945.

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Title Page
To deceive the Japanese about his true intentions, Gen William Slim had his divisions make multiple crossings of the Irrawaddy River a few days apart. The 1st ACG supported the 7th Indian Division's crossing on 7 February 1945, bombing Japanese troop positions along the Irrawaddy. Here, a B-25H from the Night Intruder Section heads back to base after attacking Chauk, with smoke rising in the distance (*3A-37552, RG342H, NARA*)

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Front Cover
The primary mission for units equipped with the B-25 Mitchell in the China-Burma-India Theatre was the interdiction of Japanese lines of communication, including the rail network. During January and February 1945, the 22nd and 491st BSs of the 341st BG, based at Yangkai in southwest China, conducted an intensive campaign to knock out the railway line leading from French Indochina into southern China. The B-25s would target rail bridges at low level, and after expending their bomb loads crews carried out sweeps along sections of the track, strafing locomotives, rolling stock and station facilities. On 18 January 1945, the 491st BS sent out 11 B-25s on a bridge-busting and railway sweep mission to French Indochina. Crews subsequently returned with claims for eight locomotives and 22 goods wagons damaged or destroyed in strafing attacks (*Cover artwork by Gareth Hector*)